THE Hudson REVIEW

VERNON YOUNG:
Russia: The Combined Momentum

HOLLIS SUMMERS:
The Third Ocean—a story

PETER BROOKS:
Balzac: Melodrama and Metaphor

STEPHEN FARBER:
Artists in Love and War

GRAEME WILSON:
Translations from Hagiwara Sakutaro

Poems by HARRY BROWN, A. R. AMMONS, JOHN HOLLOWAY, PHILIP BOOTH.

Articles and Reviews by CHARLES W. MILLARD, WILLIAM DICKEY, MARVIN MUDRICK, JOHN SIMON, J. MITCHELL MORSE, B. H. HAGGIN, DON McDONAGH, PATRICK CRUTTWELL, ALBERT SONNENFELD.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

COLUMBIA COLUMBIA

ICONS OF JUSTICE: Iconography and Thematic Imagery In Book V of The Faerie Queene

Jane Aptekar

Mrs. Aptekar's demonstration of Spenser's subtle use of iconography supports the recently growing conviction that Spenser is a naturally ironic poet who manipulates his iconographical allusions and allegorical effects to explore conflicting philosophies of justice and to create a great and complex poetic harmony. The thirty-seven illustrations provide a rich visual context for the author's discussion.

A Clarke F. Ansley Award winner. $9.50

NEGRO PLAYWRIGHTS IN THE AMERICAN THEATRE, 1925-1959

Doris E. Abramson

Between 1925 and 1959 only eighteen plays by fifteen Negro playwrights were produced in the New York professional theatre. This book is the first attempt to place those playwrights in a social and artistic context in order to observe their continuing social concerns and their artistic development as writers.

A detailed examination is given plays by Garland Anderson, Wallace Thurman, Frank Wilson, Rudolph Fisher, Langston Hughes, Hall Johnson, Abram Hill, Theodore Browne, Theodore Ward, Richard Wright, William Branch, Alice Childress, Loften Mitchell, and Louis Peterson. $12.50 cloth
$ 2.95 paper

AN INTRODUCTION TO PERSIAN LITERATURE

Reuben Levy

This work is the first to appear in English in the UNESCO Introductions to Asian Literatures. It also constitutes an introduction to the Persian Heritage Series sponsored by UNESCO and the Royal Institute of Translation and Publication of Teheran.

Professor Levy discusses the various geographical, political, and religious forces that influenced the development of Persian literature. He then examines the main trends of that literature from its ancient beginnings to its recent currents, illustrating with his own translations many of its forms. $6.00

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS, 440 West 110th Street, New York, N.Y. 10025
Address for orders: 136 South Broadway, Irvington, N.Y. 10533

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

COLUMBIA COLUMBIA

BRITISH AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Paul Delany

In the seventeenth century there was no literary genre or term to describe the many kinds of autobiographical writings that appeared. This book studies nearly two hundred published and unpublished works, and views them in the context of their culture, literature, and society. The author considers these writings a valuable source of information of their time, and he also analyzes them critically as literary works. $6.00

PLATO: Dramatist of the Life of Reason

John Herman Randall Jr.

In this book, John Herman Randall Jr. offers a personal statement of what he has found to be not merely the significance for the present day, but the eternal and ever-renewed significance of Plato. In his analysis, the dialogues emerge not as programs of action, but as dramatic portrayals of the life of the mind. The emphasis is on Plato as a dramatist and poet rather than as an architect of a rigid system of interlocking ideas. $7.50

THE MANYŌSHŪ

The Nippon Gakujutsu Shinkōkai Translation of
One Thousand Poems with a new Foreward by
Donald Keene

The poems included come from the Pre-Ōmi, Ōmi, Asuka, Fujiwara, and Nara periods. The poets represent every level of society, from emperors, empresses, and court personnel to soldiers and peasants.

Besides the translations, the cloth bound edition also includes the Romaji texts. Both editions include an introduction which provides the historical and social background of the poems, biographical notes on the poets, a chronological table, and a finding list. There are five maps (four in the paperbound edition) and a frontispiece which reproduces a page from the Katsura manuscript of the Manyōshū.

Number LXX in the Records of Civilization

Cloth $15.00
Paper $ 4.95

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS, 440 West 110th Street, New York, N.Y. 10025
Address for orders: 136 South Broadway, Irvington, N.Y. 10533

RECEIVED
California State College
at San Bernardino
AUG 4 1969
LIBRARY

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Editor:

FREDERICK MORGAN

Managing Editor:

IRENE SKOLNICK

Editorial Board:

JOSEPH BENNETT
MARY EMMA ELLIOTT
ROBERT MARTIN ADAMS
MARIUS BEWLEY

Associate Editors:

EDMUND T. DELANEY
PAULA DEITZ

Editorial Assistant:

CHARLOTTE WIGGERS

Contributing Editors:

B. H. HAGGIN, *Music and Ballet*
JOHN SIMON, *Theatre*
VERNON YOUNG, *Film*

THE HUDSON REVIEW is published quarterly by The Hudson Review, Inc., 65 East 55th Street, New York, N. Y. 10022. It is a member of The Council of Literary Magazines and is indexed in the Social Sciences and Humanities Index.

Subscription $5.00 per year in U. S.; foreign including Canada $5.50. Single copy $1.50. U. S. distributor: B. De Boer, 188 High Street, Nutley, N. J. 07110. Subscriptions in England: B. H. Blackwell, Ltd., The Broad Street, Oxford. Back issues and reprints of Volumes I—XIX available from AMS Press, Inc., 56 East 13th Street, New York, N. Y. 10003. Microfilms of Volumes I-XIX available from University Microfilms, Inc., 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Mich. 48106.

Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes. No responsibility is assumed for their loss or injury.

Opinions expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the editors.

Printed in the United States of America. Printing office: 2901 Byrdhill Road, Richmond, Virginia 23205. Second Class postage paid at Richmond, Virginia.

Registered U. S. Patent Office.

Copyright © 1969 by The Hudson Review, Inc

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VOLUME XXII
NUMBER 2
SUMMER 1969

THE Hudson Review

Articles

Russia: The Combined Momentum — VERNON YOUNG — 193
Balzac: Melodrama and Metaphor — PETER BROOKS — 213

Story

The Third Ocean — HOLLIS SUMMERS — 232

Poems

An Obliging Captain, Sailing Light, HARRY BROWN, 185; Gain; Poetics; Classics; Concerning the Exclusions of the Object; Making; Help; Script; Round; Father; After Yesterday, A. R. AMMONS, 207; Pool Place, JOHN HOLLOWAY, 229; The Stranding, PHILIP BOOTH, 230.

Translations

From Hagiwara Sakutaro — GRAEME WILSON — 253

Chronicles

Theatre — JOHN SIMON — 260
David Smith — CHARLES W. MILLARD — 271

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Music and Ballet — B. H. HAGGIN — 277
Modern Dance — DON MCDONAGH — 287
Artists in Love and War — STEPHEN FARBER — 295

Reviews
Brand Names and Others — J. MITCHELL MORSE — 317
The Paradox of Freedom — ALBERT SONNENFELD — 330
Political Animals — MARVIN MUDRICK — 333
Man Meets Dog — PATRICK CRUTTWELL — 344
A Place in the Country — WILLIAM DICKEY — 347

Letters to the Editor — 307

Notes on Contributors — 182

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE NOBEL PRIZE EDITION

Yasunari Kawabata

SNOW COUNTRY
& THOUSAND CRANES

Translated by Edward G. Seidensticker

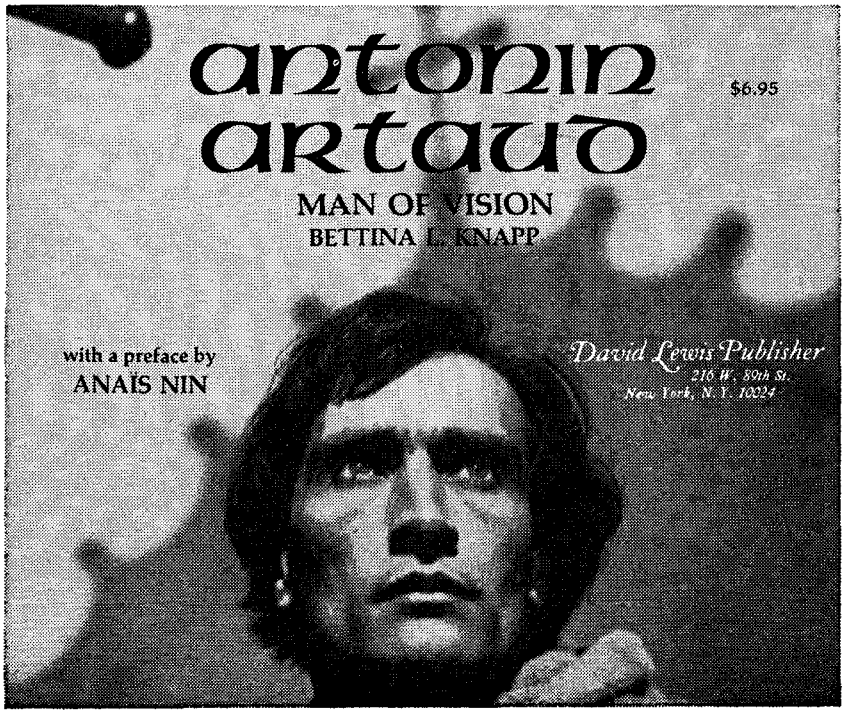
In one volume • $5.95 • Alfred·A·Knopf

antonin artaud

$6.95

MAN OF VISION
BETTINA L. KNAPP

with a preface by
ANAIS NIN



David Lewis Publisher
216 W. 89th St.
New York, N.Y. 10024

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PERLE EPSTEIN

sheds new light on a tormented genius and his masterpiece in

THE PRIVATE LABYRINTH OF MALCOLM LOWRY

Under the Volcano and the Cabbala

"Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano* is an important and difficult work, perhaps one of the few post-war novels that does not seem dwarfed when put beside Joyce or Faulkner. . . . The innumerable allegorical allusions or devices, the Faustian, Dantean, and Biblical motifs . . . [are] brilliantly examined by Perle Epstein, and all future interpreters will be in this critic's debt."
— *The Kirkus Reviews*

"A brilliant and fascinating book... the only one I know of that explores the aspect of the Consul as Black Magician and a Cabbalist."
— MRS. MALCOLM LOWRY

"Perle Epstein makes it quite clear . . . that Lowry was a student of the Cabbala and framed his novel in cabbalistic form. . . . A strangely intriguing biographical-critical work that will arouse much critical attention." — *Publishers' Weekly*

$6.95 at bookstores, or from

Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.
383 Madison Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10017

Notes on Contributors

HARRY BROWN lives in Guanajuato, Mexico, where he is at work on his fourth novel, *The Wild Hunt.*

VERNON YOUNG lives in Stockholm, and has just written a book on Ingmar Bergman and the Swedish ethos.

A. R. AMMONS' latest book, *Selected Poems,* was published last year by Cornell University Press.

PETER BROOKS* is an assistant professor of French at Yale. His book on 18th-century French novelists, *The Novel of Worldliness,* was recently published by Princeton University Press.

HOLLIS SUMMERS is on sabbatical this year, living in Sicily. Of his four books of poems, the latest is *The Peddler and Other Domestic Matters* (Rutgers University Press). His fourth novel, *The Day After Sunday,* is recently out from Harper & Row.

GRAEME WILSON* is accredited as a Counsellor and Civil Air attaché at some dozen British Embassies in the Far East. A first collection of his Hagiwara translations, *Face at the Bottom of the World,* will be published by Charles E. Tuttle later this year.

Harper & Row is publishing JOHN SIMON's anthology of adult stories for young people, *Fourteen for Now,* in the Fall.

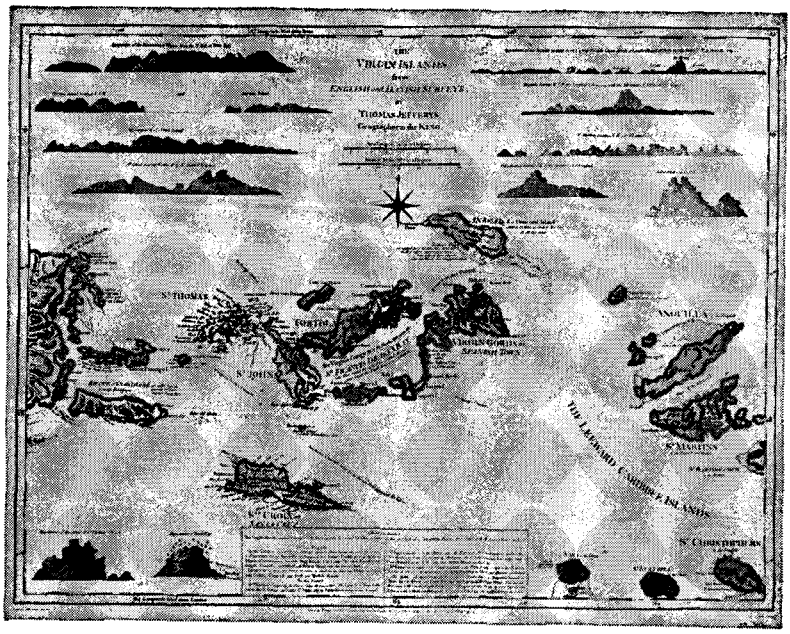
DON McDONAGH* is an associate editor of *Ballet Review* and writes on dance events for *The New York Times.*

J. MITCHELL MORSE, a professor of English at Temple University, is the author of *Matters of Style,* a textbook, and *The Sympathetic Alien: James Joyce and Catholicism.*

ALBERT SONNENFELD* is a professor in the Department of Romance Languages of Princeton University.

Asterisk indicates a new contributor

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



JEFFERYS WEST INDIA ATLAS
engraved by Thomas Jefferys, Geographer to the King
London, 1775

Barre Publishers has reproduced fifteen of these maps of the West Indies in their original plate size (18 x 24 inches) on quality paper, and hand-water-colored, to enhance the beauty and meticulous craftsmanship of the originals.

Series I

# 2 Bermuda	$17.50
# 3 Caribbean Islands, Puerto Rico, etc.	$17.50
# 4 The Virgin Islands	$20.00
# 6 Antigua	$20.00
# 7 Dominica	$17.50
# 8 Martinique	$17.50
# 9 Grenada	$17.50
The set of seven	$110.00

Series II

# 1 Index Map	$20.00
# 5 St. Kitts	$20.00
#10 Coast of Florida	$20.00
#11 Coast of Caracas, Trinidad, etc.	$17.50
#12 Jamaica	$17.50
#13 Guadeloupe	$17.50
#14 Barbados	$17.50
#15 St. Lucia	$17.50
The set of eight	$125.00

BARRE PUBLISHERS, Barre, Massachusetts 01005
Please send me the following maps from the Jefferys Atlas:

_____

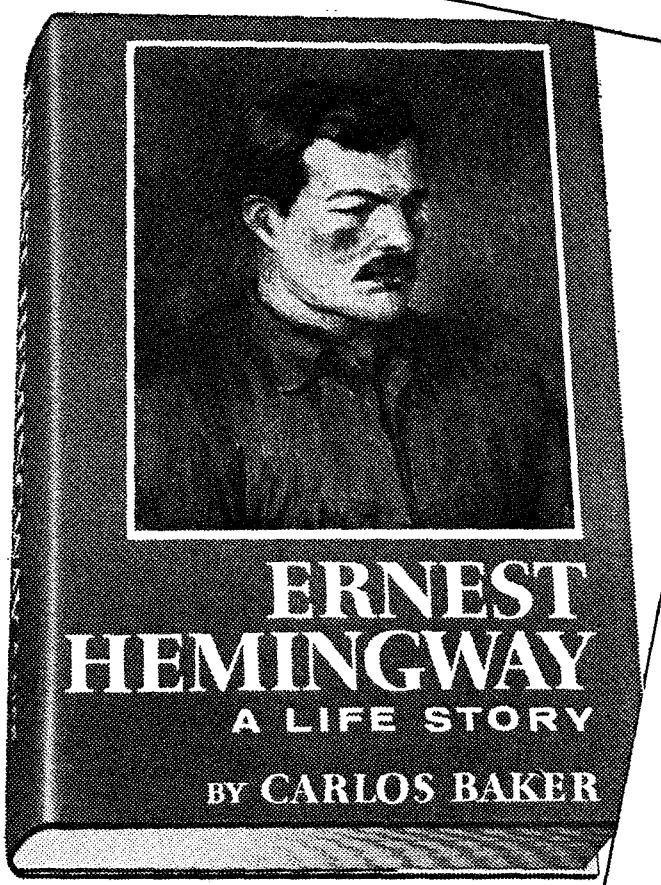
Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

(Please add sales tax where applicable)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Behind the legend, a towering artist and a complex man...

"There is hardly a page that does not contain details that will be new—and often surprising —even to Hemingway buffs..."*

Drawing on a vast amount of previously unavailable material, "this solid biography should interest not only the vast army of Hemingway readers but all those curious to learn as much as can now be discovered and told about the life of the most Byronic of the heroes of our time." —Clifton Fadiman, *Book-of-the-Month Club News**

A Book-of-the-Month Club Selection. Illustrated with photographs (many published for the first time). 100 pages of notes; Index. $10.00

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
Over a Century of Responsible Publishing

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

HARRY BROWN

An Obliging Captain, Sailing Light

A trader was a vessel which earned the livelihood of its captain by carrying annually into the smaller harbors of the Maine coast every kind of ware imaginable. Blue Hill children of the sixties and seventies had waited months for the arrival of this floating junk-shop, scanning the sea from every hill and headland for an unfamiliar sail.

An obliging captain, sailing light from Boston or New York, Philadelphia or Norfolk, would gladly undertake the filling of commissions in those centers and bring home a sundry cargo. A slip of paper, dated in 1859, gives a partial list of commissions to be fulfilled:

> For J. Candage, a hoss harness, a new hat, my own size with 2 cravats & ties
> For the minister, one cane, snake's head prefered, not to cost over $1
> For Coggin family, to invest $20 in white flour and raisins, also nuts of sorts, also toys such as marbles, tops, & a book of pictures
> For Miss Clara Wood, stuff for weding dress with threads & silks for sewing same & white lace for triming
> For little Osgood girl, a doll with black hair, blue eyes, big as possible for $1
> For Mrs. Grindle, one singing bird in cage, for the church gift. . . .

—Adapted from *A Goodly Heritage*, by Mary Ellen Chase (Henry Holt and Company, New York, 1932)

ONE

The brittle snapshot hasn't bleached away:
Blond, four, astride black iron in the sun,
I ride a cannon over Casco Bay

And grin from nineteen-hundred twenty-one.
Beneath me on concrete, its breechblock scarred,
Bulks what was once a 10-inch turret gun

On the mined *Maine*. The Eastern Promenade
Of Portland then stood death-watch on a score
Of wooden vessels, from whose decks the tarred

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Rope smell was gone a dozen years or more.
A child on a spiked widow-maker, awed,
I'd see among dry barques one giant fore-

And-aft rigged schooner, a six-master. "Lord!"
My father said, "her bow'd be 'round the Horn
Before her stern cleared Kittery." But, ignored

By steam-mad men, within three years the worn
Cancerous hulk, chain-mailed with barnacles,
Burned to the waterline. (When war came on,

Tugboats towed all the warping lesser hulls
To sea, where Coast Guard salvos sank them.) Still
She and I, new-launched, scud my heart while gulls

Halo her soughing stays'ls. Munjoy Hill
Led to the Promenade, and street-cars rose
Racketing up where boys could scan the chill

And spleeny North Atlantic. In repose
Forever in a Munjoy churchyard lay,
Encoffined in their ruined fighting-clothes,

Two captains whose brigs one September day
Were heard by Henry Longfellow, six years old,
Killing each other down Monhegan way.

The *Enterprise* and *Boxer* rang and rolled
With give-and-take of broadsides till the mauled
Hulled *Boxer*'s broken, oozing master told

Someone to strike her colors. They were hauled
Down on a splintered deck of press-ganged red:
The half-mast Yankee victors swabbed and bawled.

Two disobliging captains, sailing dead
And heavy, were an unimagined ware
For smashed war-brigs to bear past Portland Head

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And for the Portlanders who saw the air,
A bloody cargo bought with coin of blood,
Borne to adjoining graves and parceled there.

—This happened long ago, before the flood-
Tide of our power rolled, although our sun
Was ringed that early. Then the crow's-nest could

Still tempt those grinning boys whose salt-horse fun
Was stopped by algae years before I would
Say to my father, "Please, put me up on the gun."

TWO

Monhegan Island, off a drowned coast, flees
Portland and Blue Hill both, but turns its face
To starboard mostly. Blue Hill's seventies

Watched pinafored, suspendered children race
Through bayberry to top a granite verge
And teeter over whelk and carapace,

Lookouts to south'ard, blind to any surge
Of wave or sway of wrack or clutch of dulse—
Until they squealed to spy a sail emerge

From the horizon, gray above a hull's
Broadbeamed, misshapen cornucopia,
Below a white cacophony of gulls.

A high-stemmed trader, beating up from far
Great wharves where every wanted thing was stowed,
From a rag-doll to Betelgeuse the star

(The piers themselves most likely furbelowed),
Would send these children skittering to town
Between sea-pungent windrows, Friday's load

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Of hay, untedded. By spruce knolls the brown
Scratched knees pumped, pistons engineered to take
Wild news to weathered coves. Tanned eiderdown

Girls, petticoated, pattered in the wake
Of wiry, whitleather boys. A steeple's bell
Shook the church clapboards for that trader's sake.

Oarsmen were out before an anchor fell,
Chafing the vessel's flaking sides until
The bauble-loaded dories cleaved pell-mell

With a strong pull of ash to where Blue Hill
Was waiting, man and boy, for what had been,
Woman and girl, a snowbound dream to fill

A January five months long. The scene
Indeed was worth a whole dour, bitter year
Of ice-gripped expectation. Harsh marine

Vistas became green lawn, the spindrift sheer
Cliffs seemed as soft as cotton, and the deep
Heaven rolled up and back, blue tier on tier.

Like hibernators shocked from caves of sleep,
The drab folk, all too briefly, were Outside:
But passage to the light is never cheap.

By afternoon they knew that Nature'd lied.
With fogged-in evening their joy, too, was blurred.
At midnight, not with happiness, some cried.

—This happened in the youth of men who'd heard
Grandfathers tell of sea-fights past the sun's
Code-dialogue with waves. Then rumbling, furred

By distance and near groaners, came from guns:
Ours and Theirs. But now there had occurred
A time of peace, pacific. Peace is a word that stuns.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THREE

One corpse-flecked May, a later *Enterprise,*
Her baby scorpion brood dropped from her back,
Struck at a smoke-rope curving from the skies

Behind a fireball plane. The pilot's black
Kyoto lidless eyes, cold to the white
Judas-goat tracers and the mushroom flak,

Casting hot jaggéd spores to tear his tight
Death-wish projectile, held that lethal craft
Doom-steady on the *harakiri* flight-

Deck of his tacking target, just abaft
Her for'ard lift. When the poor devil crashed
He cut himself a molten metal shaft

That roiled the gray ship's guts. The impact mashed
Much of the man to gobbets, rolled the flat-
Top's deck back forty yards, and later lashed

Fourteen dead Yanks in canvas shrouds. The fat
Carrier, jangling in the flotsam sea,
Shuddered—but stayed afloat. And that was that.

It came to pass, that near the fused débris
They put perhaps half the pilot. From a face
By chance unmarred, his eyes impassively

Surveyed a new scene, a star-curtained place
That neither carriers nor planes had found,
With borders enemies could not erase,

Where peace was praised, but with no human sound.
(Giving himself, he gave a shameful more
After the Navy'd probed the flat-top's wound:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Insignia of the *Kamikaze* Corps.
Stamped on his tunic buttons, in relief,
Rose triple-petaled cherry blossoms, war

Souvenirs some Top Brass got—those brief-
Momented grim old men who, landlocked, died
Sheeted in memoirs and a lame-duck grief.)

Slayer and slain went weighted overside
To indiscriminate depths, while the huge war's
Clock went on ticking, fainter. Every tide

Sifted less wreckage to more tired shores,
Until the whale-loved oceans came at last
To sense cessation of our mortal chores,

If only for a breather. The amassed
Warships raced home to rot, slitting the slow
Swells that healed instantly when they had passed.

—This happened under thirty years ago.
Though fleets were done for, fathers sent their sons,
Back-slapped, as bull's-eyes for the planes, to show

A few enraptured captains, sailing once
More toward one last lost victory, that boys know,
If nothing else, the art of dying at man-made guns.

FOUR

A most obliging captain, sailing light
From Whence aboard the clipper *Tempus,* bound
For Nowhere, with a record voyage in sight,

Left copies of his manifest around:
Two graves, a snapshot print, a Japanese
Pilot, a list, three wounded ships, a sound

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Of vanished children squealing as the breeze
Huffs an old trader at them (perhaps a barque
Among those sad hulks, castaways of seas,

That I saw later from Fort Allen Park
On Portland's Eastern Promenade).
—I now
Drive a six-masted schooner toward the dark.

She's fore-and-aft rigged, phosphorous her bow.
I brace against the wheel-house, point my glass
And focus on the final landfall. How

Low the black coast lies! As the decades pass
I often check my own ghost-manifest,
Drawn from a scrimshawed sea-chest bound in brass.

It holds great blessings for the hardly-blessed,
Ballasts of joy for people who rejoice
No more, caresses for the uncaressed. . .

Dear little Osgood girl, dear Coggin boys,
Frail Mrs. Grindle, unwed Clara Wood,
Eager for lace and singing birds and toys,

In a bad world both innocent and good:
—I am a four-year-old whose fragile knees
Cling to a salvaged cannon. If I could,

(And so I shall, someday) *I'd fetch through seas*
Arcturus-high the shy requests you made.
But, my dead darlings, I would so increase

Our cargo as to faze the urgent Trade
Winds as we beat to reach you. All the blue
Eyed, black-haired dolls on earth would parade

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

To please one tiny girl. Each bird that flew
Would come, uncaged, to fabricate with song
Tall churches unimagined. A brand-new

Bride with a wedding-train two counties long
Would say the fine words in some song-built glade;
And there'd be, as there must be, in the throng

Of guests, called from the wave or willow's shade,
All the obliging captains, every one,
And all the unarmored children ever made.

—This ought to happen when
No! Line-storms run
In, raving, and I hear the Wild Hunt! Dear
Hearts, I'm dismasted and my schooner's spun

Heeling toward God knows what! I try to steer:
The rudder's shattered! Straddling a black gun,
Still four, still whole, still There, yet somehow Here,

I grin at my dead father's close-hauled shadow in the sun.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VERNON YOUNG

Russia: The Combined Momentum

> When the sun of publicity shines on Russia, the iniquities hidden by these walls will make one shudder.
>
> —Journal of A. Murav'ev. St. Petersburg, 1826.[1]

TWO YEARS AGO THE FIFTIETH anniversary of Soviet Russian rule was observed throughout the West with what can only be called implacable tolerance. Skeptical, dispassionately worded scrutinies by historians in quarterly reviews were read by colleagues of the authors; in journals of wider circulation and even in conservative newspapers the general tone was sporting, if not benevolent —towards Russia's prospects for evolutionary change, optimistic. Scarcely a year later, the greater number of these essays in amelioration were mocked by the Russian suppression of Czechoslovakia, if indeed they had not already been reduced to academic ash by the trial of Sinyavsky and Daniel which accompanied the Soviet ceremonies of self-congratulation. To assemble a short anthology of quotations from Western observers in 1967 and put them to the pragmatic test or, for that matter, to the test of their own avowals of internal logic, might be an instructive exercise. As a contribution to the project, I'll cite two examples, briefly; first, a schoolmaster's rebuke by an editor of *The Economist* (Nov. 4, 1967):

> If a pluralist system ever emerges out of the monolith that Lenin established—and it will have to, if marxism is ever to avoid settling down into the most consecrated ideological obstruction to ordinary peoples' progress since the medieval church—it will have been the Jugoslavs who showed the way.

Here is a manifesto of irrelevance, in miniature. Bolshevist autocracy (not marxism) has already settled down in the fashion named and its rotating leaders, whose primary aim is to secure their power, have no intention of modifying the fashion to evade accusations of medieval obstructionism. The concept would be meaningless to their ears or would be instantly re-scrambled in

[1] Quoted in *The Decembrist Movement* by Marc Raeff (Prentice-Hall, 1966).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

their semantic computer—precisely the function of *Pravda*. As for the writer's illusion that Jugoslavia is a trail-blazer to the free-market future, I'll note only that he couldn't have read *The New Class*, by Milovan Djilas.

On the other side of the ledger, the last testament, so to speak, of Isaac Deutscher, a respected authority on Russian political affairs, was published in the crucial year—*The Unfinished Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 1967)—a quite extraordinary act of faith. Deutscher explains with synoptic clarity why the ideals of the Russian revolution, as he sees them, cannot possibly be instituted, even as he fervently announces his hope that they will be. Two key sentences in his essay betray the difficulty of his position:

> Fifty years of Soviet history tell us what stupendous progress a backward nation has achieved by applying that principle [i.e. of social organization].
>
> Decades of totalitarian rule and monolithic discipline have robbed the people of their capacity for self-expression, spontaneous action and self-organization.

The statements cancel each other, unless we suppose that the late Professor Deutscher was restricting "progress" in the first quotation to a purely organizational meaning with no regard for human consequences or even for the word's shifting pertinence when applied to an alien cultural context. But then a whole cultural context can scarcely be said to exist in Mr. Deutscher's approach. He was a leftist political scientist, which is to say an intelligence (of a high order, in his case) restricted by its preference for partial definitions which it ingenuously assumes to be the sole instrumental clues to the seeming inconsistencies of history. His premise, actually a pious wish, resembles that of the writer in *The Economist*. They both assume that in some remote but predetermined way Russia is committed to adopt a form of Western enlightenment. The assumption is fairly common, inspired by three familiar illusions: that the natural growth of society is rational; that you can extensively judge other cultures by the criteria of your own; that you can predict the future behaviour of an organism from the apex of the present moment, without consulting its total behaviour in the past. But actual history is always total history, as George Santayana has reminded us (in *Dominations and Powers*, 1951):

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> All climates and all peoples are not similar, and neither the nations nor the climates, though slightly modifiable perhaps by industry, can be changed or equalized by a theory. Their character must be observed and accepted as it is, together with whatever tendencies to transformation that character may exhibit spontaneously.

Political philosophy, alone, therefore, is a notoriously inadequate key, forever at the mercy of special interests, passions and verbal manipulations.

> That which really determines action, and thereby the course of history, is the combined momentum of all the bodies and psyches concerned, which at the same time determines what passions shall be roused in the psyches, with what images of past predicaments, called motives, or of future possibilities, called aims.

The combined momentum of Russian history is what Professor James Billington has vividly recovered, in so far as anyone can do so in a single volume.[2] Published a year earlier than the Anniversary occasion, *The Icon and the Axe* seems to have been all but lost in the spate; despite—perhaps owing to—the breadth of its subject, the metaphorical treatment of its material, the positively Elizabethan drama of its narrative and the ironic temper of its conclusions, the book has had few reviewers outside the academy and has been discussed, at any length, only by specialists who, as we know, are pragmatic fellows, suspicious at the outset of cultural interpretations, drily convinced that if they can expose a dozen errors of fact or sequences "highly debatable" the whole work under consideration is negligible, and for whom the poetry of earth is ever dead or has no place in the recorded history of man's adventure. The title of Billington's book, calculated to frighten them thoroughly, might make it appear that the author has established one of those tidy Hegelian antitheses which will embrace all conjunctions and sequences. In fact he has not: the unity of Russian culture and the recurrence in it of tacit motifs is barely debatable (though perhaps never before so richly demonstrated), but the wide diversities and the complex options are by no means self-evident; it is these, within the organic envelope of the culture, that constitute the reaches of Billington's subject. Icon and axe represent a point of departure: they were the origi-

[2] THE ICON AND THE AXE, by *James H. Billington*. Alfred A. Knopf. $15.00. The book contains an Index, of which 181 pages comprise a wealth of references with bibliography.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nal artifacts of the Russian peasant that serve to exemplify the spiritual exaltation and the material struggle of Old Muscovy and which, in the course of years, have remained abiding images of intransigent and often conflicting attitudes.

Billington is exceptionally resourceful when deploying the numerous artifacts, implements, substances and elements of nature which, in the long and terrible ages of Russian history, have emerged as potent symbols (in art, in polemics, in daily customs) contingent on the driving concerns which, at a given moment, have been forcefully shaping Russian society. He writes with sustained interest and erudition on the metaphorical value of the cannon and the bell, the sea and the forest, rodents and insects, the troika, the ship, the train and the apotheosis of the musical simile. One might devote an extended essay to this feature alone of Billington's book; since, however, his pursuit of symbols is inseparably associated with linguistic derivations, the accuracy of which I am not at all competent to judge, I should prefer to imply the general character of his investigation, at the risk of radically over-simplifying it, by conveying his central attention to the three predominant forces—rarely harmonious, often at cross-purposes—which he sees as forming the peculiar compound of Russian culture: nature, itself; the Byzantine Christian heritage, and the impact of the West. Though he never employs Arnold Toynbee's terms, "challenge and response," Russia would seem to be a classic instance of the formula; her entire history has been distinguished by spasmodic, paranoid reactions to forces outside her realm that threaten, or which she suspiciously expects *might* threaten, her own invincible destiny: invariably, at such times, a counter-reaction awakens, itself composed of breakaway provinces of the spirit. Thus, a state of tension is in eternal manufacture. The Russian may experience boredom but never repose.

Nature is of course the root determinant, since the presence of the primeval forest during the rise to prominence of the Volga-Oka heartland, under the Mongol overlordship that displaced Byzantine domination after 1240, instilled the fears, the superstitions, the huddled community, the hostility towards outsiders and the instinctive habituation to the poetry of the four elements (earth, air, water and fire) which are of the essence when examining the inherited responses on which the Russian psyche rests.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Pragmatically considered, the role of rivers and their portages that guided the course of development from tribal community to world empire has been precisely expounded by Robert J. Kerner in his basic monograph, *The Urge to the Sea*[3] (1946).

"A second supra-personal force behind modern Russian culture is that of Eastern Christendom." Orthodox Christianity created the first distinctively Russian culture and provided the basic forms of artistic expression. Holy pictures, which probably originate in the death portraits of early Egypt and Syria, first became systematic objects of veneration in sixth and seventh-century Byzantium during the increase of monasticism; the Slavs, converted after the Council of Nicea (787), inherited the rediscovered Byzantine zeal for religious painting. More importantly—at any rate, more gravely—the Orthodox Church also infected Russia "with the essentially Byzantine idea that there is a special dignity and destiny for an Orthodox society and but one true answer to controversies arising within it." Dr. Billington assigns major importance to the great Schism (*raskol*) that took place during the seventeenth century when, in climactic hatred of the "cleverness from beyond the seas" (which at this hour embraced all secularizing tendencies, the "unclean Jews" and Catholic Poland), two reforming parties, moved by the common impulse to defend Russia against secularism, in effect destroyed each other. The nuclear rivals in the schismatic struggle were Nikon, Metropolitan of Novgorod and Avvakum, a fundamentalist arch-priest. The monastic or "black" clergy, attempting to expand the already considerable power of the Patriarch, encountered the equally strenuous effort of the "white" clergy, under Avvakum, to maintain religious tradition through popular evangelism and puritanical exhortation. Avvakum embodied the obduracy, the vitality and the superstition of the Eastern frontier provinces; his position was expressed in "a simple equation of trouble with innovation, innovation with foreigners, and foreigners with the Devil." Against such Western innovations as tobacco, hops, instrumental

[3] When I attended his lectures in 1940, Dr. Kerner was insistent that Russia's expansion should not be misconstrued: it was *solely* an urge to the sea, a claustrophobe's precaution that a window be open. His book implies a farther-reaching impulse and I assume he would today abandon his reservations in view of Russian troops on the border of Germany and submarine pens at Saseno on the Adriatic, which can only with euphemism be described as an urge to the sea!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

music and representational art, the fundamentalists urged censorious decrees ("The most irrational and passionate defenders of the movement were women"!); in their opposition to the theocracy of Nikon, they stood on solid Byzantine ground, maintaining that inherited church traditions were initiated by Christ, were sanctified at the early councils and must be preserved against His Second Coming. The fundamentalists were excommunicated *en bloc* and Nikon's doctrines upheld by the Church Council of 1667. Both Nikon and Avvakum were eventually banished, however, and with Nikon in exile the hierarchy never again exercised or claimed comparable political power; in a few decades, under Peter the Great, the patriarchate was abolished and the Church subordinated to the State:

> The idea that there is but one truth in a controversy was Byzantine; both Nikon and Avvakum thought of themselves as defending its apostolic heritage from either foreign corruption or domestic debasement. Each sought to make that truth relevant to Russian society through the force of his own prophetic personality. Each underwent severe physical suffering and spent his last years in lonely isolation from Muscovy. Each was ascetically indifferent to the bourgeois virtues of cleanliness and moderation. Neither of them was ever out of Russia.

The ethos of the schism remained, since "from the fundamentalists modern Russia took not fervid piety so much as xenophobic fanaticism; from the theocrats not so much Christian rule as ecclesiastic discipline." In another area, that of philosophic study, "The Troubled Enlightenment" of the early 1800's restated the dilemma. Old Russia had rejected secular philosophy because it was irrelevant to salvation and led to the overthrow of kingdoms. "Thus philosophy held for the Russian mind some of the exotic fascination of soaring comets and distant lands. Almost from the first introduction of philosophy into the curriculum of Moscow University, it acquired the subversive reputation of being a rival and potential substitute for revealed religion." When the French Revolution put an end to Catherine the Great's dallying with the doctrines of Voltaire and Diderot, ambivalence was renewed. By the end of Alexander's reign the most serious discussion of broad philosophic issues was confined to the faculties of medicine and jurisprudence. Nicolas I abolished philosophy altogether as a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

legitimate subject. "The effect of such harassment was not to prevent the study of philosophy but rather to force it out of the classroom into the secret society: away from an atmosphere of critical discipline into one of uncritical enthusiasm." Hence the proliferation of esoteric doctrines with which the century had been ushered in: higher-order Masonry, the metaphysics of Jacob Boehme popularized by Johann Schwarz, the pantheism of Schelling and, a portentous prologue to the Slavophile intrenchments of the ensuing decades, the doctrine of Peter Chaadaev who restated in philosophic terms what had already been insinuated by Leibniz to Peter the Great, by the Encyclopedists to Catherine, by the pietists to Alexander: that Russia, happily uncorrupted by the follies of the West, would fulfill its special destiny as the saviour of European civilisation. (The Decembrist conspirators, on the other hand, looked to the West, drafting their provisional constitutions in emulation of French and American republicanism!)[4] In twentieth-century Russia, the fundamentalist fanatic and the Byzantine despot have patently survived. One has only to murmur the name, Rasputin, and recall with Billington the giant statues of Stalin "which gave Russia a new image of omnipotence; a macabre parody of the Byzantine Pantokrator." It is also worth noting here that Billington analyzes the vituperative polemics of Lenin as "a throwback to the powerful intermixture of prophecy and epithet in Ivan the Terrible and Avvakum rather than a continuation of the traditional debates of the nineteenth century."

Between Russia and the West, interaction has ever been characterized by grotesque irony. The Western mollification of Russia in the last fifty years will appear to future Billingtons, if there are any, as the most inexplicable madness. The Bolshevist experiment was saved from complete rout, following upon virtual starvation in the twenties, principally by American aid, and the government thus resuscitated proceeded to annihilate twenty million of its country's inhabitants (a conservative estimate) by further starvation, forced exile and "liquidation." As a reward for its constancy, over a hundred million people from the Baltic to the Adriatic

[4] Marc Raef, whose work I cite elsewhere in this article, follows Lenin in believing that the Decembrist conspiracy was the opening episode in *the* Russian Revolution, whereas Dr. Billington sees it as a late gesture of the eighteen-century Enlightenment.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

were fed into its maw during and after World War II, thereby losing their national identities and any shadow of a claim to authentic self-determination or personal liberty. Psychologically, the advance of Soviet ideology in the West has been assisted from the beginning not only by doctrinaire Marxists (for what the chameleon term is worth) but also by sentimental slavophiles who, because they just love Turgenev, Tchaikovsky and Russian ballet have been "liberal" towards Soviet politics; by intellectual Jews who have believed until recently, incredible as it may now appear, that Russia and/or Communism was free of anti-Semitism; by brain-washed sections of the working-class, persuaded that Soviet Russia means the Good Life for the man (and woman) in overalls; and by that current breed of drop-outs, the Commy-Bohemians, to whom Jean-Paul Sartre and Peter Weiss are related, whose rationalizations would not effectively survive an hour's-worth of psychoanalysis. The irony has established predecessors, for the influence of the West, if psychologically poisonous in its own way, has of old been materially beneficial to Russia; today, Europe is reaping the rewards of its opportunism and its periodic servility. Swedes helped liberate Russia from Polish (Catholic) occupation; Swedes, Danes and Hollanders aided the portentous increase of Russian armies in the seventeenth century (from 100- to 300,000) and supplied most of the officers. Danes largely constructed the Russian navy, out of hostility towards the Swedes and even more from fear of the Dutch and the English. "Built with ruthless symmetry on the site of an old Swedish fortress and given a Dutch name [Sankt Piter Bourkh], Petersburg symbolized the coming to Muscovy of the bleak Baltic ethos of administrative efficiency and military discipline which had dominated much of German Protestantism."

To the Western literary mind, Russia is almost exclusively the great succession of poets, literary critics and fabulous novelists in the century that separates Chekhov from Pushkin. So much is this the case that John Bayley, in his splendid critique, *Tolstoy and the Novel* (1966),[5] wrote, "we cannot say *Russian* without looking back. The Russians had scarcely invented themselves before the period of invention was over, before the present time—with

[5] See the review by Marvin Mudrick, "One Bear Too Many"; THE HUDSON REVIEW, Vol. XX, No. 2 (Summer, 1967), p. 335.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

all it implies of contradiction and disappearance—intervened." And in that creative Russian century, informed by the most terrifying repudiations and apocalyptic affirmations, German and French thought were almost equally omnipresent and cogent—translated, to be sure, into Russian terms. It might safely be said that everything cultural imported from the West was diabolized by the Russians—whether we think of imperial Spain (from whom Russia acquired the techniques of the Inquisition),[6] of German philosophy, French political theory, Jewish Messianism or the English novel. The diffuse German metaphysics which we mentioned above as a consequence of underground philosophy fusing with innate Russian mysticism was more formidably transvalued by Georg Hegel who, more than any single figure, according to Billington, "changed the course of Russian intellectual history during the 'remarkable decade' " (1838-1848), reviving "in a secular form the prophetic hopes of Muscovite ideology," and providing a philosophy of history "no less absolute and metaphysical (though considerably less clear)." Karl Marx, however (who personally detested the Russians he had met and sowed his seed with no thought of harvest beyond the Elbe), was not early recognized in Russia. Pierre Joseph Proudhon who had dominated French socialist thought after 1848 and, developed a mystique of "the people," expropriated long after by Lenin, was the more direct source of revolutionary ferment. At his feet sat Bakunin, probably the most inflamed and "possessed" of all nineteenth-century anarchists, a stepson of Hegel, obedient to the conviction that total destruction must precede total freedom. Incidentally, Billington's passing observations of "unhealthy compulsions" among Russian romantics open a suggestive channel of thought ("From Skovoroda to Bakunin there are strong hints of homosexuality, though apparently of the sublimated, platonic variety"); the definitive work has yet to be written, clarifying the considerable dependence of revolutionary collectivism on the phenomenon of homosexuality.

[6] "A strange love-hate relationship continued to exist between these two proud, passionate, and superstitious peoples—each ruled by an improbable folklore of military heroism; each animated by strong traditions of veneration of local saints; each preserving down to modern times a rich musical tradition of primitive atonal folk lament; each destined to be a breeding-ground for revolutionary anarchism and the site of a civil war with profound international implications in the twentieth century" (Billington, p. 70).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Inescapably, the most memorable aspect of that Russia into which we are all early initiated is the sublime fury with which literary ideas were ingested and contested by mid-century Russian students, artists and critics. "The Russians looked to literature for prophecy rather than entertainment" and Belinsky, the literary critic, if not Bakunin, almost sums up in his own person the eternal Russian of this species for whom there are no barriers between the appetite and the judgment. "For me, to think, feel, understand and suffer are one and the same thing," he declared, a sentiment worlds removed from T. S. Eliot's attempt to separate the man who suffers from the mind that creates. Sometimes we have the feeling that simulacra of Bakunin and Belinsky divide the Russian novel between them. When we reach this point, D. H. Lawrence has spoken for our fatigue (in a review of *Solitaria,* by V. V. Rozanov, whom he called "a pup out of the Dostoievsky kennel"):

> Of these self-divided, *gamin*-religious Russians who are so absorbedly concerned with their own dirty linen and their own piebald souls we have had a little more than enough. The contradictions in them are not so very mysterious, or edifying, after all. They have a spurting, *gamin* hatred of civilization, of Europe, of Christianity, of governments, and of everything else, in their moments of energy; and in their inevitable relapses into weakness, they make the inevitable recantation; they whine, they seek unspeakable humiliation for themselves, and call it Christlike, and then with the left hand they commit some dirty little crime or meanness, and call it the mysterious complexity of the human soul. . . . *(Phoenix,* 1936, p. 367).

Late in the century, the more impetuous ideologies of change, together with the evolutionary and non-violent anarchy of a Kropotkin or a Tolstoi, were subordinated to the conviction that a single militant and "scientific" political order should replace that of Tsarism. As a serious alternative to populism (the Proudhon continuity), Marxism was introduced into Russia "almost singlehandedly" by Georgi Plekhanov as a program of "scientific socialism" repudiating impartially all forms of romantic anarchy as well as the abstract moralism of Proudhon. The possibility that from the factional wars, of "legal" or revisionist Marxists with unconditional revolutionaries, a rational middle way might have emerged is now an academic speculation. In any case, Professor Billington is a firm guide through the labyrinths of dispute that culmi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nated in the fatal years of World War I when "constitutional liberals" and Mensheviks alike were subjugated by a power closer, we must infer, to the spirit of the historical moment. Plekhanov's advice, that a democratic revolution should precede a proletarian one, was swept aside as pedantic and Plekhanov, himself, despised as much by the left as by the right wing of the new order, died of tuberculosis in Finland, even as the Bolsheviks seized power from the provisional government. "With him perished Marxism as an extension of Western radical humanism into Russia. . . ." An historian has earned the right to assume that a defeated political alternative would have fulfilled the ideal claims alleged by its defenders. Since Russia had no classical heritage, I feel that even a "radical" Western humanism would not be an authentic expression of its tendencies.

One of the unifying theses in *The Icon and The Axe* is that Russian culture, if reduced to simple outline, is a tale of three cities: Kiev, the old cosmopolitan culture, sacked by Mongols in 1240; Moscow, city of 1600 belfries and site of the Kremlin, where the new empire of the Eastern Slavs had arisen; St. Petersburg, perennial token of the Westernizing efforts first consolidated by Peter the Great. "With Stalin in the Kremlin, Moscow at last wreaked its revenge on St. Petersburg, seeking to wipe out the restless reformism and critical cosmopolitanism which this window to the West had always symbolized." The myth lately recirculated among certain sectors of the unreconstructed Left (certainly supported by Isaac Deutscher) that Lenin's pure idea was sullied by Stalin and the succession receives scant encouragement from Billington. For it was under Lenin that morality became relative and institutional, to be dictated by party expediency and deduced from scientific Marxism of which Lenin, himself, was the leading exponent and final judge:

> . . . arguments were not to be resolved but cut off, because the chief justice was also chief of the revolutionary army. . . . The full-blown totalitarianism under Stalin thus had organic roots in Lenin's theory. There were no external criteria by which the actions of the Leninist party could be judged and criticised; no limitation established on the types of questions it was entitled to resolve.

The old wind in the old anger, but now it thrashed another wood. Nothing has so baffled the Western liberal, drugged with the notion that history always moves "forward" and does so with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

some consistency, as the co-existence of brain surgery or space exploration, supposedly progressive phenomena, with an autocracy reminiscent of the worst Tsarism, without the culture. All of Stalin's cultural concepts, such as they were, had their source in the nihilistic 1860's, with echoes from the dungeons of Ivan the Terrible and the ruthless materialism of Peter the Great. One of Billington's most telling syntheses is his definition of the essential Stalinist strategy, government by systematic alternation of terror and relaxation.

> This "artificial dialectic" required the building of a manipulable and "cast-iron" apparatus totally dependent on the dictator, and the determination to make "permanent purge" a calculated instrument of statecraft. The true *homo sovieticus* was the disciplined and secretive professional officer of the dictator's sprawling police and intelligence apparatus. Just as technicians in the infamous Special Section of the Ministry of the Interior found that one of the simplest ways to "break" a reluctant prisoner was by blinking alternation of total light and total darkness, so the servants of Stalin sought to disorient and subdue the outside world with an incessant and bewildering alternation between smiles and scowls, amity and threat.[7]

So rigorous an outline of *The Icon and The Axe* as I have supplied necessarily blurs many distinctions and omits qualifications by which Professor Billington's interpretations are enriched; not only that, it conveys no clue to the profusion of interests his book reveals and exploits—the innumerable anecdotes, essays in comparison and provocative marginalia. Besides such curiosa as the origin of vodka and synopses of more than a few fantastically prophetic "science-fiction" novels, the reader will be treated to sundry essays on the changing styles of Russian architecture and the changing subjects of its quite-awful painting (both illustrated); a resumé of the almost comical excess to which the study of *Hamlet* led the nineteenth-century Russian devotee; numerous references to the immense importance of Schiller for nineteenth-century writers[8] in Russia and the quite overpowering impression

[7] The similarity of Soviet political strategy to the conditioned reflex techniques of Pavlov was suggested by an English doctor, William Sargant, who stirred up a contoversy in the London *Times*, May, 1960. For a brief summary of the dispute that ensued, see John Gunther's *Inside Europe Today* (1962), p. 310.

[8] There is a growing literature of this subject in English. Note an essay by John D. Simons, "The Nature of Suffering in Schiller and Dostoevsky," in *Comparative Literature* (Spring, 1967), University of Oregon.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

made on them by Raphael's Sistine Madonna; a chapter on the unbridled erotica that accompanied the first years of the Revolutionary regime; a discerning contrast of Moussorgsky's opera with that of Wagner, seen in terms of the *zeitgeist,* and scores of astonishing images, such as the moment from the so-called Silver Age of Russian arts when, in the summer of 1910, "Scriabin's complex tonal patterns were played on a boat floating down the Volga under the direction of young Serge Koussevitzky, wafting music out across the unresponsive and uncomprehending countryside."

As becomes an historian of such versatility, Billington ends his book in a mood of ironic recapitulation and in reasonable doubt of the nature of Russia in days to come (a ship voyaging into the unknown is his final concession to the cyclical imagery he has all along been emphasizing). Bearing in mind his unflagging conviction that Russia, under the iron lid, is an organic religious society still, and by recourse to Wright Miller's book, *Russians As People,* (1960) a concise and wholly admirable study, we may feel generously disposed to believe that Russians, when seen as intimately as Miller saw them on their native ground, are potentially the only people in the world today with the spiritual capacity for regenerating the future society of mankind. (Miller confidently describes the capacity as "the national passion for human nature.") In the twentieth-century West we have raised generations of Calibans, corrupted by a species of materialistic liberalism which has radically failed to dignify its adherents or even to unify them except in their faculty for self-contempt and for destroying what remains of a tradition which too painfully exposes their unfitness for rising to the challenge of its finest principles. Yet our perennial and perhaps sentimental need (Rozanov said the West would be destroyed by pseudo-compassion) to distinguish the Russian people from the Russian political hierarchy is forever being chilled by the gruesome suspicion that there is in the Russian soul an abiding sado-masochistic tyranny: through centuries of change a villainous regime has always been able to impress its despotism on the millions. If Dostoievsky is basic to an understanding of the Russian beneath the skin, as most of his disciples believe, what are we to make of his insistence that Russians have an obsessive craving for suffering—"perpetual and unquenchable suffering"? As good post-Freudians we know that those who *crave* suffering

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

usually evoke it; if the boon is denied them they will slake their paranoia by making others suffer in their stead. . . . There is finally a discouraging continuity that links the abject recantations of many Decembrist officers (who staged the "first Russian revolution," a disastrous failure, in 1825) and those of the deviationist victims of Kremlin purges in our time:

> I was first infected with liberal ideas during the campaign in France . . . my criminal cast of mind was set from the day I became a member of the [Decembrist] society.
>
> I acquired my insane liberal ideas during my stay in foreign countries. . . .
>
> I cannot say that anyone's acquaintance forced me to forget all my obligations . . . it was rather the doings of my youth, my unbridled personality. . . .
>
> I acquired the nefarious liberal ideas which led me into such horrible errors from reading books and from the company of. . . .
>
> I drew my first liberal ideas from the tragedies of Voltaire, which to my misfortune fell too early into my hands.
>
> . . . I was led to criminal ideas by the influence of other people. . . .[9]

[9] M. Raeff, *op. cit.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A. R. AMMONS

Gain

Last night my mind limped
down the halls of its citadel,
wavered by the lofty columns
as if a loosened door had
let the wind try inside
for what could go:
dreamed of the fine pane-work
of lofty windows it
would not climb to again to see,
of curved attics aflight with
angels it would not
disturb again: felt the
tenancy of its own house,
shuffled to the great door and
looked out into its permanent dwelling.

Poetics

I look for the way
things will turn
out spiralling from a center,
the shape
things will take to come forth in

so that the birch tree white
touched black at branches
will stand out
wind-glittering
totally its apparent self:

I look for the forms
things want to come as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

from what black wells of possibility,
how a thing will
unfold:

not the shape on paper—though
that, too—but the
uninterfering means on paper:

not so much looking for the shape
as being available
to any shape that may be
summoning itself
through me
from the self not mine but ours.

Classic

I sat by a stream in a
perfect—except for willows—
emptiness
and the mountain that
was around,

scraggly with brush &
rock
said
I see you're scribbling again:

accustomed to mountains,
their cumbersome intrusions,
I said

well, yes, but in a fashion very
like the water here
uncapturable and vanishing:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but that
said the mountain does not
excuse the stance
or diction

and next if you're not careful
you'll be
arriving at ways
water survives its motions.

Concerning the Exclusions of the Object

Today I
looked for myself,

head full of
stars,

cosmic
dust in my teeth,

and small,
lost

as earth in such a
world, I

fell around my
cell's space

and said
I must be here—how

can I get the seeker
home into these jaws:

how
can I expel these roomy stars?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Making

In wingbar light
the mockingbird
takes the day into
making
takes the clouds still
shipping stars
takes the spring trees'
black small leaves
and with staid motions
and many threads
brings into
view
lightens
and when morning
shows sings
not a whit more beautifully
because it has been dark

Help

From the inlet
surf a father
pulls in a crab—
a wonderful machinery
but
not a fish: kicks
it off the line &
up the beach
where three daughters
and two sons take
turns bringing cups
of water
to keep alive, to
watch work, the sanded
& disjeweled

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Script

The blackbird takes out
from the thicket down there
uphill toward
the house, shoots
through a vacancy in the
elm tree & bolts
over the house:
some circling leaves waving
record
size, direction, and speed.

Round

I sat down
from too much
spinning & spun
the great spin's calm:
I said
  this is
  like it is:
bluebirds
stripped my shoelaces
for nesting:
pill bugs took the cool
under my shoesoles
and weeds, sprung up,
made me their
windbreak:
I said
  this is
  like it is
and got up turning
out of the still into
the spinning dance

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Father

I dreamed my father flicked
in his grave
then like a fish in water
wrestled with the ground
surfaced and wandered:
I could not find him
through woods, roots, mires
in his bad shape: and
when I found him he was
dead again and had to be
re-entered in the ground:
I said to my mother I still
have you: but out of the
dream I know she died
sixteen years before his
first death:
as I become a child again . .
a longing that will go away
only with my going grows

After Yesterday

After yesterday
afternoon's strungled
clouds and white rain
the mockingbird
in the backyard
untied the drops from
leaves and twigs
with a long singing

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PETER BROOKS

Balzac: Melodrama and Metaphor

I

THE MELODRAMA OF *Père Goriot* is patent enough: the novel turns on secrets and mysteries, false identities and masked relationships, lurid and grandiose events; its moment of moral crisis involves a murder disguised as a duel (arranged by a disguised escaped convict), while the protagonist lies unconscious from a potion of drugged wine. The narrative tone consciously adopts the breathlessness of melodrama from the opening page, where the narrator claims for his tale the label of "drama . . . despite the abusive and contorted manner in which it has been used," adding that his drama is no fiction, but rather the drama of the real, for "All is true." The essential mode of the novel is melodramatic, and all its tropes correspond to this mode: in particular, the characters' attitudes are "sublime" and "immense," their gestures of heroic proportions, hyperbolic.

Eugène de Rastignac's first social call is structured around two verbal gestures, the first of which opens doors, produces a sense of belonging, and a flood of light on society; the second, obscurity, rejection, and a permanent barring of passages. If his arrival is obviously a nuisance to the Comtesse Anastasie de Restaud (who is receiving her lover, Maxime de Trailles), when the Comte de Restaud enters she introduces Rastignac with the "magic" phrase, that he is "related to Mme la Vicomtesse de Beauséant by the Marcillac": a formulation which is a "stroke of the wand" opening "thirty compartments in the brain of the young man from the Midi" and restoring to him "all his prepared wit"; which provides a "sudden light" to make him "see clear in the air of high society." The Comte de Restaud is then all polite attention, and discusses ancestors until Rastignac announces his acquaintanceship with someone he has just perceived leaving the Hôtel de Restaud, Père Goriot: "At the mention of this name, prettified with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the sobriquet *père,* the Comte, who had been attending to the hearth, threw his tongs into the fire as if they had burned his hands, and stood up. 'Sir, you could have said Monsieur Goriot,' he cried." In a moment, Rastignac perceives that there has again been a stroke of the wand, but one that has had the "inverse effect" of "related to Mme la Vicomtesse de Beauséant." The subject is changed, Rastignac's departure hastened: and upon his leaving the Hôtel, we hear the Comte give his valet the order that they will never again be at home to Monsieur de Rastignac.

Rastignac has seemingly, without his or our quite knowing how, made an unseemly social gesture, committed what he qualifies as a "gaucherie." Such an outcome of a first venture into society by a young provincial would seem to be too banal to merit further comment: we appear to be well established on the plane of comedy of manners, witnessing a scene which could be found, doubtless with greater subtlety, in Marivaux or Richardson, Jane Austen, Stendhal, Henry James, E. M. Forster—any of those novelists whose attention and efforts at representation are directed to the texture of social life, the significant gestures of actors on the public stage of society. Balzac indeed refers us to this stage and this texture when he talks of the "magical effect" of social formulae, the importance of an omitted "monsieur," or when, a few pages later, he comments that Rastignac has made progress in that "Parisian code which no one talks about but which constitutes a high social jurisprudence which, well learned and well practiced, leads to everything."

Yet the crudity of Balzac's rendering—the excess of the Comte's reaction, the hyperbolic speed of Rastignac's complete acceptance and complete rejection—is troublesome: the social gestures he dramatizes seem the motions of the bull in the china closet, where more is broken than need be to make the "point" about Rastignac's social inexpertise. In fact, Balzac's social gestures do not really have the volume and opacity of those we find in a novel of manners: there, gestures are counters which have value in terms of a system, a social code which forms their context and assigns their meaning. If the first magic phrase, "related to Mme la Vicomtesse de Beauséant by the Marcillac," seems a reasonable equivalent to any social identification found in Jane Austen or Stendhal or Forster, his disastrous mention of Père Goriot cannot

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be assimilated to Emma's insult to Miss Bates, Julien Sorel's failure to change into silk stockings for dinner, or Leonard Bast's confusions with an umbrella. These refer us to the code, in terms of which they are inappropriate, embarrassing, wrong. Rastignac's gaffe is other, it is charged in a different manner; it is more than socially inappropriate or wrong, because it evokes a context other than the social; it is potentially revolutionary. It is in fact the unwitting first draft of a metaphor which is inadmissible because literally destructive of the manners of the social upper class. And to understand how this is so is to understand why Balzac is not simply writing bad (unsubtle, crude, melodramatic) comedy of manners, but something else, something we might indeed accurately call "melodrama of manners."

The "Parisian code" which Rastignac must master is only on the surface a code of manners. This is already suggested in the preliminary circumstances of his visit to the Restaud: he stumbles into a dark passage, overhears voices, and the sound of a kiss, from a hidden staircase, then sees Père Goriot almost run down by the Comte de Restaud's carriage, then given a greeting of "forced consideration" by the Comte. Such circumstances go beyond the idiom of social comedy to call into play mystery and melodrama. And Rastignac's mistaken verbal gesture cannot fit within the framework of manners; it raises other, threatening questions. He discovers why in the course of his next social call, on Mme de Beauséant: Goriot is the publicly repudiated and secretly exploited father of Anastasie de Restaud, as also of Delphine de Nucingen, a man who has been banished from his daughters' drawingrooms where he appeared "a spot of grease," but is frequently called to the backstairs for cash. Rastignac's mention of Goriot in the Restaud drawingroom has indeed had the effect of a "grease-spot," because it is the juxtaposition of a public social style and its unavowable genetic and financial substructure. Rather than simply committing a social impropriety, Rastignac has cut through the very texture of social life to what lies beneath, the greasy, unspeakable substratum which is supposed to remain hidden.

A metaphor, according to I. A. Richards, is a "transaction between contexts," and Rastignac has precisely violated the single context of codified social manners, has unconsciously conjugated

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

together two contexts which must remain separate. The draft metaphor must be conjured away by the Restaud because it is dangerous, revolutionary in the manner of all metaphor because the transaction brings a certain merging of the two contexts, an end to their sharp differentiation in a new fusion, a new unitary vision of the whole—a vision whereby, in this case, society is no longer Society, a closed system of manners, but a layered structure, where what is at the top can and must be explained by what is underneath it, and precedent to it.

Rastignac's draft metaphor cannot in fact be conjured away: the whole novel is in a sense structured on it, and moves toward clear articulation of it—articulation which belongs to the hero and expresses the clear vision of society on which he is to found his personal comportment. The most decisive formulation of the metaphor comes during Mme de Beauséant's final ball, where Anastasie de Restaud and Delphine de Nucingen are decked in diamonds bought or redeemed with their father's last money, while he lies dying in the meanest room of the Pension Vauquer: Rastignac "saw then beneath the diamonds of the two sisters the pallet where Goriot lay stretched in pain." The essential words here are *beneath,* which expresses the relation of superstructure to substructure, the way the display of wealth of an arriviste upper class is furnished by the exploitation of labor and commerce; and *saw,* which suggests that the economic reality is visible through the veneer of manners, the substructure implicit in the superstructure: and Society hence threatened by the organization of society.

The image is, like Rastignac's gaffe in the Restaud drawing-room, crude, gross—a direct, unsubtle metaphor expressing a basic relationship; and there are countless others in the same style, in the mouth of the narrator and almost all of the characters. Clearly, such metaphors would be out of place in the worlds of Stendhal, Jane Austen, or James. Yet they are clearly constitutive of Balzac's world: he has earned the right to use them because they are the tropes that correspond to the melodramatic mode he has chosen to exploit. The same necessities govern mode and tropes: Balzac is not attempting to represent a drama within the social code, nor trying to render the texture of social intercourse and the interplay of individual destinies on the social stage;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he aims rather at uncovering and dramatizing the structures of society, its basic governing relationships, and the play of individuals in terms of the forces and structures, horizontal and vertical, which define the total organization of the human community, and the true dimensions of the human experience. Like the novelist of manners, he is attracted to the social sphere that yields the most significant gestures: the highest. His careers are exemplary. But for Balzac (and there is doubtless an historical cause here, in the French Revolution's destruction of *le monde,* Society in its eighteenth-century sense) this sphere can never be understood alone: its meaning is gained from juxtaposition to its substructure. Therefore the theater of Balzac's drama cannot have the closure and self-containment of the true novel of manners: it must be metaphoric, based on a drama of interacting contexts. His whole method, that is, must be analogous to his metaphors: it must juxtapose different contexts and show their interpenetration, it must reveal the copresence of superstructure and substructure, articulate the governing relationships. And therefore the manners dramatized cannot themselves have the opacity, volume, fixity and sublety of those in a true novel of manners: they must always reach toward the total structuration, call into question the autonomy of the context in which they seem to exist, become charged with a significance which splits the frame of comedy of manners. Hence a melodrama of manners: a drama of hyperbolic gestures, of supersignificances.

II

It is the Duchesse de Langeais, calling on Mme de Beauséant when Rastignac arrives to pay his visit, who strikes the theme of the lesson of morality these two noble ladies give to the young provincial: "Society is a mudhole, let us try to stay on the heights." The image is ramified on all levels in the novel. Paris, Rastignac concludes after Vautrin's first lesson in the ethics of success, is morally a mudhole; to which we must juxtapose Mme de Beauséant's remark that Delphine de Nucingen "would lap up all the mud there is between the rue Saint-Lazare [quarter of rich bourgeois like Nucingen] and the rue de Grenelle [in the Faubourg Saint-Germain] to gain entry to my drawingroom." Literally, Paris is again a mudhole, and if you cross it on foot you get your boots

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dirty, which is what happens to Rastignac on the way to visit Mme de Restaud (and while waiting in the antichamber, he has occasion to compare his own to Maxime de Trailles' impeccable boots). "Staying on the heights" means, among other things, taking a carriage, and this too has immediate moral ramifications: " 'And an odd sort of mudhole,' replied Vautrin. 'Those who get dirty in a carriage are honorable men, those who get dirty on foot are crooks.' " To go into the streets of Paris is a descent, the descent of a woman like Anastasie who after the ball goes to seek the usurer Gobseck, a condition generalized by Vautrin as a continual vertical movement: "Yesterday at the top of the wheel at a Duchess' . . . this morning at the bottom of the ladder at the moneylender's: that is the Parisienne." Near the start of the novel, the narrator evokes the start of Dante's journey when he compares approach to the rue Neuve-Sainte-Geneviève (where the Pension Vauquer is located) to entry into the Catacombs: "as, with each step, light diminishes and the chant of the guide goes hollow. . . ."

The novel reposes on its two most widely separated terms, both horizontally and vertically: the Pension Vauquer and the Faubourg Saint-Germain, the worlds inhabited respectively by Goriot and by Mme de Beauséant (and, potentially, Goriot's daughters). It is Rastignac who almost daily experiences the distance between the two, who journeys from one to the other. The ethical experience of the novel is constructed on his returns from the upper world to the lower, the journeys (mostly night journeys) which bring to consciousness his moral choices, and the possible formulae for permanently leaving one world for the other. Upon his return from his first visit to Mme de Beauséant, hesitating between the career in the law he has initiated and the splendors of society to which he has been exposed, he makes a decision to "open two parallel trenches leading to fortune, to brace himself both on learning and on love, to be a learned doctor of laws and an *homme à la mode*." To which the narrator comments that parallel lines never meet.

Something more germane to the necessary approach is suggested by the tailor whom Rastignac convokes after remarking how poorly his suits compare to Maxime de Trailles', a tailor who considers himself "a hyphen between young men's present and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

their future." A hyphen is the beginning of a relationship, of a juxtaposition and a passage; it is related to metaphor, to the construction of a ladder out of the mudhole. And construction is imperative: Rastignac's progress cannot be uniquely one in awareness about society, the consciousness of its structuration which allows him at the end to formulate the metaphor juxtaposing Goriot's deathbed and the sisters' diamonds; it depends on the fabrication of his own metaphor of action, one which will allow him to excape the confines of one context and penetrate within the other. Consciousness and construction are in fact interdependent: as soon as Rastignac acts, he understands; as soon as he understands, he acts again. The two are mutually elucidating, and like all of Balzac's parvenus, Rastignac moves with exemplary, hyperbolic, melodramatic speed.

But the metaphor presupposes for its construction (as the hyphen for its insertion) a median term, a "vehicle," which, in Balzac's universe, is inevitably money. Money, Rastignac discovers as soon as he starts to open his parallel trenches, is the *"ultima ratio mundi"*: what we might call the eisenoplastic power of society, enabling one to perform the transaction between contexts. And yet, the acquisition of money implies a choice of means which, according to Vautrin's exposition of society, is an absolute and total commitment of the self: there can be no parallel trenches because virtue is indivisible—it either is or isn't—and Rastignac is summoned to choose between two great symbolic attitudes toward society, Obedience and Revolt. Paradoxically, the vehicle of metaphorical passage, money, threatens to lead beyond metaphor to a symbolic reduction of life to one of two mutually exclusive gestures.[1]

Vautrin, critic of "a gangrened society," disciple of Rousseau in the manner of Sade, is in fact a moral absolutist, and it is the "puritanism" of his ethics which tends for a time to make of Rastignac's choice a symbolic moral melodrama or even allegory. His proposition to Rastignac is restated by Rastignac to Bianchon in a gross analogy: if one could become rich simply by willing

[1] The general question of the "symbolic reduction" of metaphor is perceptively discussed by James Guetti (himself referring to Martin Foss's discussion in *Symbol and Metaphor in Human Experience*) in the final chapter of *The Limits of Metaphor* (Ithaca, N. Y., 1967).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the death of one unknown and aged mandarin in China, should one accept? This simplifies accurately: Rastignac need only consent to Vautrin's assumption of the role of Providence; Vautrin will have young Taillefer killed in a duel, Victorine Taillefer will become her rich father's sole heir—and she is already in love with Rastignac. Vautrin assumes a Mephistophelean guise, and the moral problem is reduced to its simplest, most grandiose form: temptation. " 'What kind of a man are you,' cried Eugène, 'you were created to torment me.' " The moral crisis and climax of the novel is a *Walpurgisnacht* where the hero, sotted by drugged wine, listens to his tempter's projects without being able to summon the force to protest, a nightmare realm where gesture cannot be made to accord with intention, where crime can only be assented to, and unconsciousness finally takes over to create a gap in time, Rastignac awakening only at eleven o'clock the next morning, to find that all has been consummated.

We ought surely to see in Rastignac's drugged lethargy a metaphor of his essential moral passivity: he has at least analogically killed the mandarin. Yet the melodrama is so arranged that Rastignac will never have to face the "bargain" effectuated in his name (Vautrin is hauled off to prison), and the threat to his metaphorical construction posed by Vautrin's symbolic reduction is conjured away. Indeed, Rastignac's response to Vautrin's symbolic alternatives is always a refusal of choice: to Obedience and Revolt he adds a third term, Struggle. And Struggle is precisely the effort to answer the two primary symbolic gestures with metaphor, with a constructive, mediative effort which rejects exclusive commitment to one or the other.

This effort will take the form of a transaction between love and money. "I don't want to think about anything," Rastignac concludes after Vautrin's first temptation, "the heart is a good guide." He calls on this principle to reach the decision not to profit from the crime committed by marrying Victorine Taillefer. But we should not be the dupes of this decision: what in fact comes to save Rastignac as he walks in the Luxembourg struggling with his conscience is the recollection of a message transmitted by Goriot just before the previous evening's crisis, that Goriot has taken and furnished an apartment which will serve as a place of rendezvous with Delphine de Nucingen: "He remembered the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

confidences made by Père Goriot the previous evening, he remembered the apartment chosen for him near Delphine, in the rue d'Artois; he took out her letter again, reread it, kissed it. 'Such a love is my anchor to windward,' he said to himself." Such is his Beatrix, his salvation offered: the apartment of the rue d'Artois, scene of his liaison with Delphine, is the means of constructing a liaison to the "heights." When he is in the apartment, struck by momentary guilt at the evidence of the expenses incurred by Goriot in furnishings, he resolves his moral struggles with the grandiose phrase, "I will be worthy of all this." Worthy, that is, of "this complete luxury, these beautiful dreams realized, all this poetry of a young and elegant existence." Delphine is defined by this poetry of luxury; she is an object whose price is set by her accessory objects, the "luxury of the courtesan," as Rastignac qualifies it: or as her husband puts it in *La Maison Nucingen,* she is "the representation of [my] fortune, an indispensible *thing.*" Rastignac's first meeting with her led to the gaming tables, and the first kiss she bestowed was a reward for winning seven thousand francs to pay her debts. The success of his courtship is assured when he has obtained for her an invitation to Mme de Beauséant's ball: "he went promptly to see Delphine, happy to be able to procure her a joy the price of which he would undoubtedly receive."

Delphine is Rastignac's appropriate and necessary *rite de passage:* the luxury/love she incarnates constitute both the solution to Rastignac's moral dilemma and the necessary mediating term in his passage from the Pension Vauquer to what we know, from subsequent novels, will be the highest positions imaginable. Ex-Goriot, banker's wife, ambitious of promotion into the Faubourg Saint-Germain, she is the perfect realization of "Parisian love," the fusion of love and money to the point where they are indistinguishable, so that Rastignac's ambition and acquisitiveness can always be translated into terms of love (solving the moral predicament posed by Vautrin by taking "the heart" as his "guide"), and his love for her immediately translated into cash and position (solving his problem of transition: and in a completely literal sense, it is Delphine's husband who will make Rastignac's fortune). Each of the two terms "means" the other; Rastignac saying love also says money, and begins to construct his ladder, his metaphor.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It is to this construction that Rastignac returns at the last, when, after accepting all his disillusionments about Delphine's character, after facing the menace of the absurd posed by Goriot's death agony, he stands on the heights of Père Lachaise cemetery following Goriot's burial, and looks down on Paris. The final passage is preceded by a metaphor of a baroque complication and excess announcing the end of Rastignac's youth: "he looked at the grave and buried there his last tear of youth, a tear brought forth by the sacred emotions of a pure heart, one of those tears which, from the earth where they fall, rebound into the heavens." After this last gesture of mediation with the celestial, and the moral realm, Rastignac is spiritually complete for his encounter with the real antagonist:

> Alone now, Rastignac took a few steps toward the height of the cemetary and saw Paris lying serpentine along the two banks of the Seine, where lights were starting to shine. His eyes focused almost avidly between the column of the Place Vendôme and the dome of the Invalides, the dwelling place of that good society into which he had tried to penetrate. He threw at this murmuring hive a glance which seemed in advance to suck out its honey, and spoke these grandiose words: "Now between the two of us!"
>
> And as first act in the challenge hurled at Society, Rastignac went to dine at Mme de Nucingen's.

Metaphor and melodrama reach a perfectly controlled climax in symbolic action. Rastignac's situation—standing on the heights of Père Lachaise, a mountain of the Parisian dead, another, immobilized Paris (the theme is developed by Balzac at the end of *Ferragus*), facing and looking down on the Paris of the *beau monde* stretched out with a contained reptilian energy along the Seine between the two commanding beacons of the Vendôme column and the Invalides—is excessively grandiose, already a gesture of disproportion, but of necessary disproportion and excess because it allows Rastignac to perform a summary operation upon Paris and Society. The city becomes a beehive which his glance possesses in its vital richness, sucking its honey, extracting its wealth. So hypostasized and vivified, Paris can be turned into the antagonist and called to arms. Yet the challenge, the act of defiance, is an act within society—as its institution in his going to dine at Delphine's shows; not Revolt, but again Struggle, which

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

aims not at overthrow but at possession. Or rather: it is Rastignac's melodramatic metaphoric command of Paris from the heights of Père Lachaise, and the grandiose and excessive terms in which he expresses what is literally a *vision* of reality, that permit his gesture to make the passage from revolt to possession, which subsume the former to the latter because society has been seized in its totality and its essence, in a gathering together of all its structures, movements, implications into essential metaphors.

The formation of gross, encompassing metaphors which give summary representations of an immediate intellectual grasp of society, and the exploitation of a technique of juxtaposition of masses, hyperbolic forces, including the grandiose and disproportionate gesture—a technique of melodrama—are interdependent and central to Balzac's representation of society, which addresses itself, not to the texture of gestures and voices which we call manners, but to a totality of understanding, a sense of the structuration of the whole, and the place of each human gesture, motive, decision within it. It is wrong to seek here a subtle unfolding of a problem of ethics and comportment within a system of manners. The virtues of the melodrama of manners are different: it continually refers us through manners, below and beyond them, not only to psychology, but to society conceived as the theoretical totality of human relationships, passions, gestures, as a total economy. Hence scrutiny of any particular of reality will lead through the surface to the center, to a "truer" reality, and finally to the vital unitary principles.

III

Much has been said—most strikingly by Erich Auerbach in *Mimesis*—about the relations of people to things in Balzac: how, especially in the celebrated liminary description of the Pension Vauquer, the objects amongst which man lives announce him, imply him, define him. The adjectives applied to the furniture of the Pension already people a human world: the furniture is "proscribed," placed in the Pension "as the debris of civilization are put in the Hospital of Incurables"; chairs are "dismembered," or, in a suite of adjectives which moves from the objective to the completely vitalized, "old, cracked, rotted, wobbly, gnawed, one-armed, one-eyed, invalid, expiring." What we

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

should also perceive is how, as description of objects opens onto the human condition, description of people inevitably leads to questions about the mysteries of passion lying behind their appearance, the structure of melodrama implicit in their faces in the form of interrogations. "The boarders gave a premonition of dramas finished or in action," the narrator announces. Then, in his account of Mlle Michonneau, after five lines of description, he suddenly passes to the interrogatory: "What acid had stripped this creature of her female forms? she must once have been pretty and well-made: was it vice, sorrow, greed? had she loved too much, had she been a wardrobe dealer or simply a courtesan? Was she expiating the triumphs of an insolent youth . . . ?" And with Poiret, after thirteen lines of description: "What work could have so shrivelled him up? what passion had blackened his bulbous face . . . ?"

The real, or more precisely the intelligent human glance directed at the real in the act of possession by description, inevitably leads to interrogations, to the sense of something behind, of a mystery and a drama to be elucidated. The technique rapidly passes beyond "realism," because the real—in the sense of the concrete, the apparent, the immediately seizable—slips from our grasp, loses its solidity and opacity, opens up depths that cannot be dealt with by sight alone, which rather demand vision. Reality is both the scene of a drama for Balzac, and the mask of the real drama; and in almost every Balzacian narrative there comes a moment when the prose "takes off" (or indeed "turns on"), when appearances are passed through or reabsorbed in something else, in a vision of the total human melodrama.[2] Hence the characters' gestures refer us, not to the contexture of other gestures, the structure of appearances we call "manners," but to the implications behind gestures, to another "true" reality both masked by and implicit in what we ordinarily call reality. A striking instance occurs in Balzac's tale *Facino Cane:* "And he made a frightening gesture of extinguished patriotism and disgust for things human." This is very literally a gesture—a move-

[2] This movement, in Balzac's narrative as well as his description, and also the question of the relation of sight to vision, have been very well described by Albert Béguin in *Balzac visionnaire* (Geneva, 1946), to my mind the best critical piece written on Balzac.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ment of the hand; yet it is obvious that no movement of the hand could "really" be charged with such significance, could contain so much meaning. The gesture as such in fact virtually disappears, is eclipsed and obliterated by the meanings which the visionary narrator can read in it: the signifier, one might say in the terms of linguistics, is destroyed by the signified.

In this sense, it is apparent that virtually all gesture in Balzac is by essence metaphoric: it constantly constructs on the basis of the real, out of the real, the implications of a truer, more significant superdrama, a melodrama which is merely figured in the domain of the actual, by "real" gestures which appear finally as shadows both concealing and speaking of the true drama. And this is as accurate a description of Rastignac's disastrous verbal gesture in the Hôtel de Restaud as it is of Facino Cane's wave of the hand: because Rastignac creates a transaction between two contexts, rending the texture of manners, he locates the drama in a world *beyond,* which is first of all the world of true, because total, social structurations, then the realm of the true, central, emotional and moral drama of the novel. The same can evidently be said for Rastignac's moral drama, where the effort to transact between different contexts becomes—as Vautrin's statement of the problem, and Vautrin's mythic dimensions, force us to see—an effort to transact between two great symbolic gestures toward society. The final gesture in Père Lachaise expresses the successful metaphorical operation performed on Paris and society and allows us—and Rastignac himself—to see his career as hyperbolic, exemplary, the very type of the truth.

The world, said Claudel, is before us like a text to be deciphered. But whereas for Claudel each discrete particle of reality can in the end directly be related to—because in the end it directly emanates from—a spiritual unity, in Balzac the final reality, and the way to it, are more elusive. We open first onto the melodrama of social experience, and the mystery of passion; particulars of reality both speak of this mystery and conceal it, hence call forth the questing effort to understand, and then finally to go beyond to the organizing unitary principles in the realm of the spirit. Rhetorically, we pass from description to increasingly audacious efforts to construct metaphors for the total organization of society, the total human experience, and the forces which

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shape and determine all experience. It is of course the *Oeuvres philosophiques* that provide the final metaphors of the unitary forces: the electric power of the will in animating the world, the "fecundation of matter by spirit," as Béguin accurately states it—Balzac's "angelism," straining toward the ultimate metaphor predicted by Louis Lambert: "Perhaps one day the reverse of the *Et Verbum caro factum est* will be the summary of a new Scripture proclaiming: *And flesh will be made Spirit, it will become the Word of God.*" Even within the frame of the single novel *Père Goriot,* however, one can detect the development of one such principle—and one of Balzac's central metaphors—in the interiorization of the novel's melodrama, the melodrama of the spirit. The form this takes is implicit in the title: it is the drama of paternity, of creation, of the incarnation of the mind.

"When I became a father," says Goriot, "I understood God. He is complete everywhere, since all creation came from him. Sir, so am I with my daughters." This immediately transcends the level of what we ordinarily think of as vicarious existence to move into a higher realm, that of the creator who lives in his creation: not simply *through* the other, but *in* an otherness which is a new realization of the self, a new objectification of the mind, a metaphor of the ego. Vautrin, whose motto is "there are no principles, only events, there are no laws, only circumstances," understands that such a lack of clearly visible laws of organization leaves the superior being a large liberty to invent them: "I will take upon myself the role of Providence," he proposes to Rastignac; "I will force the will of God." And it is Vautrin who explicitly carries the metaphor to its next stage, that of literary creation: "I am a great poet. I don't write my poems, they consist in actions and sentiments." Rastignac is the necessary scene of this poem, the vehicle for the realization of Vautrin's dreams of creation, the metaphor by which the Word is made flesh: "A man is everything or nothing. He is less than nothing when he is named Poiret, you can squash him like a bedbug, he's flat and he stinks. But a man is a god when he looks like you; he is no longer a machine covered with skin but a theater where the most beautiful emotions are acted out. . . ."

The sterility implied in Vautrin's homosexuality is hence transmuted into creative fertility, the power to make life, the arroga-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tion to himself of the role of Providence, the temptation to godhead. His dream of a patriarchal society in the southern United States is to be realized through the ascension of Rastignac to the highest social sphere: two poems, indeed, to be written from one intellect with the same metaphor—Rastignac-as-beauty translated into Rastignac-as-money (Victorine Taillefer's dowry). Yet his relation to his creature-metaphor will be thwarted: man will fall off from his creator, be unequal to his conceptions (or: free from his intentions), and institute distance between the two of them—or else, as will be the case with Vautrin's second protégé, Lucien de Rubempré in *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes,* betray God. (A more successful self-deification is achieved by the usurer Gobseck, but only because he is miserly, self-contained, sterile, and never attempts a creation: he is finally a poet figure after Mallarmé, pure inviolable *logos* never made flesh.) Goriot too is betrayed by his creation, and in his deathbed monologue this "genius of fatherhood" reinvents Hamlet's interdiction of marriage: "Fathers, tell the Assembly to make a law on marriage! . . . No more marriages!" Marriage is accursed because it destroys the vertical, genetic relationship of father and child, creator and creature, to substitute for it a horizontal social relation which, the novel has amply demonstrated, is a denatured contract, a barter, a commerce, institutionalized prostitution. In his final rantings, Goriot reverts to another, precedent, primary social organization: "I protest. The nation will perish if fathers are trodden underfoot. That is clear. Society, the world turn on paternity. . . ."

Society does not perish; it rather succumbs to secularization, class stratification, commercialism, legalism, the play of means and modes of production and their superstructure in manners: the whole network of relations which the novel has sought metaphors to express. And hence it opens up possibilities for the grandiose personal gesture aimed toward a reorganization, a new principle of unity, a new metaphor of governing creation: the erection of self to godhead we find in Vautrin—and a number of other Balzacian monomaniac geniuses—and in Balzac himself, in his presence as creator, in the drama of his insane effort to "compete with the Civil Registry," to know and to conquer the drama of life through the melodrama of this fictional metaphors,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to recreate the discrete particles of the real in a synthetic spiritual vision. In "the long prison of his labor," as Henry James called it, he engendered creations with profligacy, spawned metaphors of the spirit made flesh, only to find, like Vautrin (punishment for the sin of aspiring to Godhead?) that the creations ramified in independence, grew vital on their own: that his characters performed what Béguin calls an "insurrection" against their creator, an insurrection which accounts for the sense of novelistic freedom that James found in Balzac, the way he gives each character "the long rope, for acting [himself] out."[3]

This of course is the destiny of any valid work of art, which must always live in a state of insurrection, in a declaration of independence from its creator. It is a destiny that can perhaps provide a last elucidation of metaphor and the melodrama of manners as Balzac uses them. The struggle to organize the mass of metaphors of the *Comédie humaine* calls into play new metaphorical efforts—new transactions between ever larger contexts, and the ever-renewed attempt to work through such transactions to essential structurations, to the basic drama, and ultimately to the principles of all creation—which finally have the effect of making the whole opus an exacerbated nerve center where a touch on one strand provokes reactions through many different chains, where one particular object, or person, or destiny can constantly be seen in other contexts, in terms of something else, in a chain of metaphoric mutations. This may suggest a final explanation of why Balzac's mode can only be melodramatic, a theater where everything is pushed toward the grandiose, the hyperbolic, the sublime.

[3] See "The Lesson of Balzac," in *The Question of Our Speech.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JOHN HOLLOWAY

Pool Place

Never since the rock-pool first
Locked its radiant dwarf sea
Where the primal tide reversed,
Showed it more tranquillity
Than we see now in these weeds
Poised in light as day recedes.

Megachronological
Spreads the deeper image; yet
Also it could be some small
Child's delight, prone on the wet
Lips to trace the sea-wrack curled
Frond by frond; or brittle knurled

Urchins and the oyster's rasped
Pachyderm. But boys' or girls'
Heedlessness would not have grasped
How the inside shell is pearls:
Nacreous light in total black,
Is that aphrodisiac

Just like bare skin to ourselves
As we unenclose its hints?
But among the rock-pool shelves
Bivalve must conceal the tints
Lighting its inside with day:
Else the star-fish tense and prey

Till that rainbow darkness tires.
All is text and paradigm.
Weed-frond round internal fires—

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

We can see quite plain that time
Works as usual, what is more,
Down the rock-pool-studded shore.

As we ponder, time has passed.
Darkness has begun to fall.
Luminousness does not last.
These incoming breakers sprawl
Strong and fleet as sea-gull's wing
Into our resistless ring.

Till we find a hint of farce
Mar the image of the pool:
Things that slight perspective glass
Poises, just delight the fool
In the end. So comes my wish:
Opt for open sea, my fish.

PHILIP BOOTH

The Stranding

When I put my eyes up to
the eyes of my skull and
look in through both eyes

at once, out beyond shoals
of porpoises that sport
as if they'd been whelped in

my inner ear, all I can see
is myself at infinite
focus: a man the tide caught

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on that same tidal ledge
where all his life
he has gathered kelp.

I can barely make out
his blue jacket and seaboots.
The tide is still coming.

His skiff is already gone.
It's already gotten dark
at the top of my skull;

through cracks in that sky
the Northern birds are homing.
Wreaths of kelp float up

through the bedrock; if I
weren't stranded so far
from myself, or if

the wind veered, I might try
to yell his name. But he's
already begun to listen

to how, as they whistle
and roll to breathe,
the porpoises click for sea room.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

HOLLIS SUMMERS

The Third Ocean

Bill was three and Tim was a baby when the Travises began going to the ocean every summer. They had not missed one summer in twelve years, and now their ages were multiples of three: four and five times three, and thirteen and fourteen times three. William Travis did not mean to make anything of the fact. He thought of their ages while he was driving slowly behind three long trucks outside Grafton, West Virginia. He thought of saying, "We are multiples of three," but he did not want Emily to say, "What a silly thing to think of," and so he said nothing. Instead he passed, without caution, one of the long trucks, and Emily said, "William, please."

But Tim mentioned their ages the first afternoon at Delmont Beach. The four of them were building a sand castle. Tim said, "You know what? We're all three times something." He spoke as if he were speaking to the turret. He said, "And three is very mystic. Red, white, and blue; past, present, and future; and Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."

Emily said, "Really, Tim!"

Bill said, "How cloddy can you get?" but he spoke without heat. "And chocolate, and vanilla, and strawberry." He scooped another handful of sand from the base of the castle wall.

William said, "I think that's very interesting, Tim." He was pleased with his son's observation, but he was determined to find no significance in the chance of their similar thoughts. "The air is soft," William thought. But if the boys and even Emily should have said in chorus, "The air is soft," he would have found no significance in the chance of their repetitions. "It is a lovely afternoon," William thought.

Bill's wall collapsed. "Good gosh. I'm too old to be playing in the sand. For gosh sakes."

Tim said, "Because of the threes, this is a *very* important summer."

"Every summer is important." William spoke casually. Already the sand and sun and water had made him feel casual.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tim said, "But this is *especially* important because of the *threes.*"

Bill said, "I think maybe he's really flipped." He stood up and adjusted the snap-on glasses he wore over his regular glasses.

"Here now," William said casually. The shafts of Bill's glasses were pale against his brown skin, but the snap-on lenses were circled in black. From William's angle the boy looked like a vast insect, or a man from space. "Here, here."

Bill brushed the sand from his trunks on to Tim. Tim hit at Bill's legs. Bill kicked at Tim's part of the castle, but the turret did not fall. Tim said, "Look at what you almost did, crazy." Bill said, "D'ja hear what he called me?" Tim said, "That's good enough for you."

William allowed his eyes to study Emily's profile. She was always beautiful. And she knew how to handle the boys, certainly. And she had not reacted at all to the word *crazy*. Last year she would have jerked her head toward him, suddenly, three lines between her eyes.

He was quite well now. He had worked too hard, enlarging the store and its sales force, arranging new accounts, reorganizing the books. The chaste signs on the windows were true, finally. The signs finally said, *William Travis*. For years after his father's death he had kept the name *T. R. Travis and Son* on the stationery, and the windows, and the accounts. But if ghosts walked, T. R. Travis would not recognize the store now. William had a right to be proud of his work. He had only worked too hard.

It was fatigue. A year ago last February the doctors in Cleveland had agreed it was only fatigue. In three weeks William Travis had learned to look more easily at the world. In three months he had almost learned to reaccept himself, and the world of Madison, Kentucky, and the world itself.

A person could not blame Emily's fear of her husband's sickness any more than a person could blame himself for fatigue. Emily lived in a single world of *twos:* good and bad, Catholic and Non-Catholic, sane and crazy. Fatigue swam dark in a sea of threes, once, over a year ago. But now the boys could call each other crazy quite naturally. Even Emily was not bothered by the word. William was not bothered by the word, or the boys, or multiples of three, or even the thought of a great shark who swam some-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

where, always. Emily was a good companion. A man of forty-two could not expect to be a lover forever. Surely many wives refused themselves to their husbands, even young wives, even their young husbands. And sharks swam in every season.

The old man at the Shell Service Station, back in Madison, was the first person to mention the summer sharks. When William was signing the credit slip for the gasoline, the grease job, and the new tire, the man said, "They're certainly having a lot of trouble with those sharks."

William had not dreamed of the great shark in months. Perhaps he lifted his head suddenly to the old man, but he was not troubled by the man in gray overalls who spoke of sharks. William watched his own hand steadily make his own name. He finished making his name before he asked the man where they were having trouble.

The man raised his hand to his ear. William had forgot, for a moment, that the man was deaf. William spoke loudly, "I said, I haven't seen a newspaper!"

The man pushed at the bill of his cap. "I forget just where it was. Somewhere along the east coast."

William had meant to tell the man that they were going to the ocean. He liked to say, "We are going to the ocean." Landlocked in Kentucky he had never said *beach,* or *shore,* or even *the coast.* Old Miss Markham, who had worked in Children's Wear ever since William wore Children's Wear, teased him about saying *the ocean.* "I don't know why I say it, Miss Markham." She was the only employee left from his father's time. He could not keep from feeling awkward in her presence. If one of his own clerks had teased him about saying *the ocean,* he would have said that naming *the ocean* made him grow taller. He had an easy relationship with the men and women he had hired himself.

The service station man's name had slipped his mind. "We're going on a little trip," he said. He liked the quiet slow man. Sometimes in their brief conversations William swore a little, and the quiet man always said, "You're god damned right, Mr. Travis," and they smiled at each other.

"Have a good trip, Mr. Travis." The man knew everybody's name, just as T. R. Travis had known everybody's name a long time ago. "And be careful."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"We're just going for a week. This year I can't get off any longer." He did not say, "We are going to Delaware." He did not say, "I am afraid to try the ocean for longer than a week."

They had spent one night on the road as usual. They arrived early Wednesday afternoon as usual. Everything was almost as usual, but they knew where they were going to stay. When they were younger they had merely ridden to the ocean and found a cabin. Now they preferred the comfort of a reservation. One of Emily's Vassar friends had given them the name of Delmont Beach and Mr. Meigg. Emily kept close touch with her past. Or perhaps her past was always present. William regretted that Emily had never met his father.

He did not miss a turn in arriving at Ocean Side Cottages. The cottages did not view the ocean, but they were on the ocean side of the highway: twelve little box cabins facing each other and a square gravel driveway. They did not look unlike the postcard Emily's friend had sent, and the rent was remarkably inexpensive. Emily delighted in economizing on vacations. "We can have luxury at home. And you meet more interesting people off the beaten path," she was always saying. "This is very adequate," Emily said. And there was Mr. Thomas Meigg, the proprietor of Ocean Side Cottages, sweeping the front step of one of the cabins as they drove into the square.

"I bet that's ours," Tim said.

"Bet you anything," Bill said.

It was number three, and only incidentally, their cabin. Tim said, "See?" And Bill said, "See what, silly, I'll beat you in the ocean."

Mr. Meigg leaned his broom against the clapboard wall. "Welcome to Ocean Side." His voice was a harsh whisper, and his face was so scarred that it was difficult to look at him straight. "You made good time."

Tim shook Mr. Meigg's hand, and said, "It's very nice to meet you." Bill shook his hand, and then looked away, humming under his breath. William found himself ridiculously moved by the boys' sudden manners. Bill even stood back to let Tim go first into the orange shellacked walls. Emily, of course, was entirely gracious.

"Fine. Yes, this is very attractive. Yes," she said in the sparsely furnished partitioned box which was cabin number three. "Twin

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

beds," she said, as if she had not specified twin beds in her letter to Mr. Meigg. "And a stove, and sink. We can have our breakfasts here. How nice."

William tried to imagine the partitions to the ceiling, making two bedrooms, a family room, and a bathroom. Parents who were lovers would need to love cautiously within these walls. And men who cried out their nightmares could not cry privately. But he was being foolish. He had promised Emily he would not bother her any more. And he had not dreamed of the shark in over a year, not since Florida.

"You'll want to sign the registery," Mr. Meigg said, "And towels. I'll give you more towels, if you come on up to my place."

Mr. Meigg's cottage was closer than the cabins to the ocean, but still hidden from the ocean by the dunes. Mr. Meigg whispered that the news didn't look very good but the weather had been fine. He said he liked August at the beach better than any other month. He said he had a place in Florida, too; incidentally, Mr. Meigg would be glad to have their business if they happened to find themselves in Florida.

"You in the war?" Mr. Meigg asked as he handed William the plastic book entitled *Friends Who Called.*

"A little while," William said, looking straight at Mr. Meigg. "I had a short trip."

The man lifted his hand to his scarred cheek. "Then we don't need to talk about it any."

"Of course not," William said, knowing he would not speak of Mr. Meigg's war to Emily; he did not want her to consider Mr. Meigg an interesting person off the beaten path. "I'm sorry," William said, wishing for other words.

"That's fine," Mr. Meigg said.

"We were in Florida last year." William began to write his name. "At New Smyrna. In June. But only for a couple of days. We ran into a lot of jelly fish."

The Portuguese Men of War were deformed pink and purple balloons, covering the beach at New Smyrna the morning after the Travises arrived. For two days the Travises sat in a cove and sunned. "Please, please let us go in the ocean," the boys said.

"Get hold of yourself," Emily said. "You're well now. The doctors said you were well."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"They're just jelly fish," the motel proprietor said.

They had made love the first night in the motel. It was the last night they had made love.

"Please let us go in, just once."

"Your father is making the decisions," Emily said, but it was Emily who made the decisions after Florida. "We're too old for all that stuff any more, William. I think it upsets you. We're too old to be like silly young lovers, William."

"Please, please," the boys said.

But William had insisted that they go back to Madison, Kentucky. He could not say why; he could not remember why. There had been no rumor of sharks in Florida.

"They blow away," Mr. Meigg said.

"Florida has some fine beaches."

Mr. Meigg lifted his hand to his scarred ear. William raised his voice. He would raise his voice all week to Mr. Meigg even if the man were not hard of hearing.

"Hurry, hurry," the boys called outside the picture window of Mr. Meigg's house that faced the sand road.

"Hurry," Emily said. She looked very young. She wore her white suit. Emily owned many bathing suits.

"I'm hurrying," he called, as he closed Mr. Meigg's register. "But don't wait for me."

First he hung the four yellow towels carefully on the bathroom racks. T. R. Travis always said that his son got his tidiness from his mother. But William could barely remember his mother. She was a gray squirrel coat and the odor of violets. William and his father lived in the big house on Court Street for all of their lives together. A series of housekeepers walked through the parlors and kitchen of the big house. And always there was Miss Markham of Children's Wear, advising and consoling and occasionally coming for dinner in the oak paneled dining room. William did not really believe that Miss Markham had been his father's mistress. Small towns always insinuated relationships; he had managed to separate himself from the insinuations of Madison a long time ago.

He took the four suitcases out of the station wagon. He picked up the clothes Emily and the boys had left in the bedrooms. Emily's clothes made hieroglyphs perhaps: she did not have the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

memory of a gray squirrel violet mother. William started to pull down the cracked green blind: the blind was crossed and curved and dotted, almost as if it were deliberately patterned. A light behind the blind would pattern the ceiling with constellations: "There's Venus," "And there's the Milky Way," "And even Mars," lovers could tell each other. But Emily had obviously undressed without pulling down the blind. They were at the ocean. A man discovered his body at the ocean; he became an anonymous body at the ocean.

William placed his folded sport shirt on the dresser. He hung his trousers on the rod which hung in the corner of the bedroom. He stepped into his athletic supporter and trunks. He turned back the beds for the night. The sheets were quite clean, almost blindingly clean. Ocean Side was all right. After the boys had said Cloddy and Bletch, or whatever words they were currently riding, they would say, "This is O.K. This is really O.K.," and Emily would speak naturally of *our house* and write a long letter to her Vassar friend in St. Louis.

He closed the screen door as carefully as if someone slept in cabin three.

He walked down the sand road, past Mr. Meigg's house, past three more cottages with screened porches and television aerials, the ocean pounding in his ears.

Twelve years ago he had first taken his family to the ocean—a South Carolina ocean. He did not feel any older than twelve years ago. He wore the same body. The body he wore had never really seen the ocean without Tim and Bill and Emily. He did not count the other ocean he had traveled as a young man in a troop ship, to be wounded a little, to be hurriedly returned to Madison, Kentucky. He did not count the other ocean he had sailed as a child with his parents, searching through a winter for his mother's health. He had not really seen the ocean during the war or that other time, not the way he was going to see it now, not the way he always saw it with his family, except for the last time in Florida.

The third ocean was the only ocean.

He did not break his step as he mounted the rise of the dunes.

And there it was, exactly as he remembered it, the way it always was, lovelier than he remembered it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Emily and the boys jumped in the breakers. They hung a moment against the sky.

"Hurry Daddy," Tim shouted.

William ran as fast as he could run toward the vast water.

He needed the ocean. He did not doubt his need, or his desire. He did not try to differentiate between the dark requirements of need and desire. The ocean was neither Emily, whom he remembered well, nor his mother he could barely remember. This ocean was the ocean.

He was fifty feet tall. The waves knocked him down because he allowed them to. He was stronger than any tide. He could swim to Portugal, if he cared to; he did not care to swim to Portugal. He lingered among the breakers because he wished to. He was knocked down because he wished to be knocked down. He neither doubted nor questioned his need or his desire. Tim had spoken of the *threes* because Tim happened to think of the threes. Everything that happened was a coincidence, or nothing was a coincidence, and neither way mattered presently or finally. *The third ocean is.* Values lay in living—that is what the doctor in Cleveland said, that was the way to look casually at the world. If William Travis thought of the natures of number or mystery, he thought of them casually.

For four days the ocean did not disappoint him, not with a third, or a ninth, or a thousandth wave. He read without much concern of sharks in waters that bordered New York or Maryland or Georgia. He deliberately bought newspapers at the doors of restaurants up the highway. He did not avoid discussing the sharks with the elegant grandmother and her son and daughter-in-law who sprawled under the next umbrella, or the old couple who walked the beach three times a day, or the young parents who crowded the water, or Mr. Meigg who never came to the beach. "Haven't seen a shark since I been here, three years now," Mr. Meigg whispered, smiling. "They aren't going to scare me with their shark talk," the grandmother said, glaring at her very pregnant daughter-in-law, moving into the water to swim her graceful side stroke, returning gracefully: "Do you see any shark marks, Jennifer?" The old couple, holding hands, went into the water up to their thin knees. "Keep a sharp eye out. Sharp eye," the old lady said. The two boys, whom Bill named the County

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Snakes, fished every afternoon and evening for the sharks. "We'll get 'em," they told each other, hitching at their tight trunks. "We'll get us some."

Until Sunday the Travises left the beach only to eat. Every morning William rented a chair and an umbrella from the two blonde young men who wore *Life Guard* on their tee shirts and drove a scarlet Jeep up and down the sand. "I can't feel they're much protection, those Life Guards," Emily said. "But they count change well." "Silly William," Emily said. "They'll Life Guard if they need to," he told her.

All day the Travises sat on the beach, rubbing oil on themselves, dipping in and out of the ocean. The boys were companionable; they did not quarrel much; "Come on in," they called, and William came. Emily joined them in fashioning a sand castle at least once a day. But most of the day she sat in the chair under the umbrella and wrote letters, and read, and did her nails. Most of the day William lay near her, out of the shadow of her umbrella, looking at the clean white scenery.

"My, you're getting brown," she said.

"This is good for us, isn't it?" she said.

"The boys are sturdy, aren't they?" she said, waving her nails to dry in the salt air.

Once, on Saturday afternoon, she lowered her book and smiled gently at William. He did not mean to make anything of a wife's smiling at her husband. He wished she would reach out and touch his shoulder, but he did not wish deeply. And he had promised to leave her alone, before God he had promised. "We're not going to get a divorce, William. We will work out our human salvation," she said in the Florida motel. She had obviously prepared the words she was saying; perhaps she had even rehearsed the words before Father Baldwin back in Madison. "Look at me, William. We are husband and wife because we are married in the eyes of God, and because we are the parents of two children." "But the other night. . . ." he said. "That was a mistake. We're going back to Madison, and we're not going to have any more of that . . . stuff. Look at me, William, and promise.'

"You promised, you promised," she said the few times he had tried to forget or ignore his promise. "Before God you promised."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He had not challenged her God or his own promise. For a year now, because he was weak and dominated, or because he was strong and wise, or because, because, because: because a man had to work out his human salvation, he accepted Emily's edict and his own promise.

"We aren't a typical family any more," Emily said, smiling at Delmont Beach. "We're older than the other families now, aren't we? We're the oldest family all together at the beach."

"Oh I don't think so," William said, although he had noticed the young families that first afternoon even before Tim spoke of the *threes*. "The boys are fine."

Emily said, "At the ocean everybody used to be in their thirties and have two children. At the ocean we used to be everybody's age."

"Now they have four and they're still in their thirties." William's laughter sounded quite natural in the bright sun. "We like family beaches. We've always said so." He pushed himself up to sit in Emily's shade.

"Next year, Bill will probably be—I don't know, somewhere on his own." She was not smiling now.

"There's no reason. . . ." William's eyes held Emily's eyes; he had to force his eyes to keep looking "We've always said we liked our ocean because it wasn't Miami, or Virginia Beach, or . . . or Rehobeth."

"Of course we do. It's silly to think about." Emily shrugged Her breasts moved in her white suit.

"In Florida . . ." William said, taking his eyes from Emily's breasts.

"You promised, William." Her voice was not unkind. "We promised each other we wouldn't talk about that any more. We've stopped talking about that time. That was part of your promise, William. You promised."

"Sure," he said.

Before she lifted the book from her lap, she said, "I complimented Mr. Meigg on Delmont. He said it was a fine place if you weren't wanting to *go* all the time." Emily laughed. "That's exactly what the man at Pauley's Island said."

"I know," William said, but his wife was reading.

"It's a lovely afternoon," the old woman said, and the old man nodded as if he had thought of the comment himself.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Fine, fine," William said, stretching on the sand.

In the evenings after dinner they walked, as they had always walked at the ocean after dinner. The boys ran ahead of them, sometimes lost, sometimes appearing suddenly behind them or at their sides, stamping stiff legged into the waves and out. Always they walked toward the flush of light at the edge of the sky, and always the boys suggested that they walk clear to the town ahead, Myrtle, or Santa Monica, or Rehobeth.

As usual Emily said they would save town for a rainy day. "There are always rainy days at the ocean," she said.

Sunday morning she took the boys to the early service at the little Catholic church up the highway. William lay on the beach by himself under a sky that held clouds a while, and the sun, and clouds, and the sun, and clouds. "Careful, baby don't let the fish get you," the young mother with the lemon colored hair called to her toy doll child. The clouds did not look like maps or elephants or human beings. "If I am not contented, I am thinking about the word contentment." *Catch, catch. Good morning. Lovely morning.*

"Mother says why don't we go to Rehobeth for lunch," Bill said.

"Maybe this is the rainy day at the ocean," Tim said under the sun.

He had slept. He had never slept on a beach in all of his life. The boys stood above him in their Sunday suits.

"I was asleep. I went to sleep," William told his sons.

"My how nice we look," the elegant grandmother said.

"Do you want to go to Rehobeth for lunch?" Bill asked.

"Fine, fine," William said. "Everything's fine at the ocean."

"Everything's fine at Rehobeth, but I'm ready to go home," Tim said.

"Home?"

"I mean our house. Our cabin, I mean." Tim laughed sputtering his popcorn. Bill laughed too.

They had eaten well; they had walked the board walk; they had placed dimes in machines to receive their fortunes, and scarlet candy, and glass rings; they had ridden on The Sea Basket which tilted and twirled them against the sky; they had wandered in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shops and bought pennants and cotton candy and souvenir flashlights. In Greshwin's Sea Knacks Bill put his arm on Tim's shoulder as they studied an aquarium that contained sea horses. The proprietor smiled at the boys and went over to talk to them.

In the car Tim said, "That man said the father sea horse has the babies."

"He takes care of the eggs," Bill said. "He doesn't lay them."

"One father had five thousand babies last week and they all died."

"More like five hundred, or more like fifty," Bill said.

"But they all died."

"Why don't you turn on the radio?" Emily asked.

William turned the left knob, and after a moment he twisted the other knob until a newscaster's voice entered the car. His voice was young and apologetic. He spoke of another miracle in space.

"Hey, leave that," Bill said.

"Golly," Tim said.

The announcer had finished telling of the miracle. He told of the shells in Greshwin's Sea Knacks.

"That's where *we* were," Tim shouted. "What do you think about that? That's where *we were*."

"Everybody knows that," Bill said.

"And now for the news of our area," the announcer said.

"Space is our area," Tim said.

"Hush up," Bill said.

It was not the coincidence of turning a dial three times that brought the shark into the car. They would have heard of the shark from Mr. Meigg anyhow. It was better to have heard of the shark first from the apologetic announcer.

At Indian Beach a shark had chased Mr. T. M. Robbins into the shore. Mr. Robbins escaped without injury. Mr Robbins said he had thought he would never see his family again. Mr. Robbins was swimming from fifty to sixty feet off shore. The shark was estimated to be at least nine feet in length.

"Where's Indian Beach?" Tim asked.

"South Carolina, I think." Emily had not been listening to the radio she had asked to hear.

William started not to say, "Indian Beach is the third one

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

down from us." He had stood in a service station in Madison, Kentucky, and studied the names of the beaches that swam down the map: Delmont, Tompkins, Ranger, Indian. "It's the third one down," he said angrily.

Bill said, "I'll be."

Tim said, "I'm never going in the ocean again, not ever, not forever and a day. I'm not ever going to set foot in the ocean, not ever."

"That's enough," William said, glaring into the rearview mirror.

Bill jabbed his elbow into Tim's side.

"Well I'm not, and quit hitting me."

"Boys," Emily said.

Bill flounced himself into the corner of the seat. He leaned his forehead against the window. His lips moved.

"Stop that muttering," William said, and more quietly: "Speak up, if you have something to say."

Bill's face grew large in the mirror. He leaned hard against his father's shoulders. "What's a shark, I'd like to know. And now I bet you won't let us go in at all. I bet you make us go home tomorrow, just because of one little old shark." His voice cracked. His voice was almost crying. "I bet it'll be like in Florida."

Emily turned.

"I'd be ashamed," Tim said.

"Well, I mean it. It's going to be like last year in Florida."

"Bill!" Emily's knees whispered against the nylon seat covers. "Bill, I told you."

Bill was crying. A fifteen-year-old boy was crying in the back seat of the station wagon. "You won't let us go in, and who's afraid of a shark, and they won't be at our beach anyhow," the fifteen-year-old boy cried.

"We'll see." William's voice was as loud as if he spoke to the deaf. "We'll see. Now straighten up there."

"We'll see, we'll see, we'll see," Bill muttered.

The words were the words of T. R. Travis. But at least T. R. Travis had pretended intimacy with his son. T R. Travis often said, "*We'll see* means I am not capable of being a responsible law-giver. It means give me time for the situation to change so I won't have to make a decision."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

William said, "I said, 'We'll see.' Now, quiet, all of you." And, after a little while he said, "I'm sorry."

But the boys were arguing in low voices over how long was fifty feet; it was twice as long as their living room, it was "about out to there, no, a little bit further," it was the length of the pool. When they turned into Ocean Side they were challenging each other on the number of pecks in a gallon.

Mr. Meigg was readying cabin number six. His scarred face chuckled as he came over to place his hand on the sill of William's window. His fingers were thin, but smooth. "Did you see the shark?" he whispered.

"We heard about it." William made himself look into the man's eyes.

Bill put his hand on William's shoulder. "Here? Was the shark here on our beach?"

"They sighted him. Just after noon." Mr. Meigg laughed at the thought. "He was a big fellow. I stood on the dunes and watched. They were after him with shotguns and clam rakes and everything. It was a sight." Mr. Meigg removed his hand from the sill to laugh and cough against his smooth fingers. "They were after him with everything. They didn't catch him, though." He was delighted with his story. "Clam rakes, and shotguns, and even brooms. One old fellow had a broom."

"Really? Really?" Tim said.

"I would expect a land-owner to keep this quiet." William spoke casually.

Mr. Meigg did not seem to understand. "You expect all sorts of things at the beach," he said, as if William had not spoken.

"Is there danger, of swimming, for us, I mean, for the boys?" William spoke loudly.

"Oh, I don't think so." Mr. Meigg was unable to stop smiling. "You just have to be careful. They're fast."

Emily said, "If we all go in together. . . ."

"That's right. You can see them coming. They zigzag. But you can see them all right. This morning one of them chased a man clear up to the beach down at Indian, the same one, I guess."

Tim said, "It was nine feet out and fifty feet long." He giggled. "I mean the other way around."

"He just chased him right in." Mr. Meigg giggled too, as if he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

were not old enough to have been wounded in a war. "The sea was quiet as a millpond, and he chased him right in."

Tim and Bill were asking questions together. William could barely distinguish their questions, but Mr. Meigg was answering the boys separately. "But you probably won't ever see one," Mr. Meigg said.

In the cabin William said, "Are they going in, Emily?" He found it difficult to think about the shark.

The boys stood at their bedroom door. They had already taken off their shirts. They held their hands at their hips; their stance was the stance of the County Snakes.

Emily lifted her hand to the lamp on the table. With the forefinger of her right hand she circled the top rim of the lampshade. She did not turn on the lamp, of course; she was beautiful in the sudden light that came from somewhere. It was the sun, of course. The sun had come out as suddenly as it had disappeared while they were talking to Mr. Meigg. William thought of other beaches where they had made love. "You're the father," she said. "You make the ocean decisions."

"Please, pretty please," Tim said. "For gosh sakes," Bill said.

"There are always sharks." William kept his voice as soft as Emily's. "We'll just have to be careful." The words were not difficult to speak. They were not nearly so difficult as saying, "We'll go back to Madison."

"Very well," Emily said. "I'll dress in the bathroom." She sounded no more pleased than if he had said, "I love you, Emily. Oh Emily, I love you."

"Oh boy," Tim said.

As he removed his clothes William thought, "Oh boy, oh boy," trying to think of Tim's pleasure. He wished to think his moment of decision into importance, at least into more importance than a moment of indecision. He was naked. He was in his bathing trunks. Tim stood at the door. "Ready, ready? Are you ready?"

"Ready," William said.

Behind Tim Bill stood scowling through his glasses. "Why don't you leave your glasses here?" William asked.

Bill stepped back. He flipped his towel savagely against Tim's legs.

Tim whirled, yelling, "You dog, you, you. . . ." His towel sailed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

across the room. It landed against an empty milk bottle on the drainboard. The bottle teetered before it fell to the floor. The sound of its breaking came slowly, like thunder after lightning.

Bill was shouting. "Did you see that? What are you going to do to him? If I'd a done that, I'd never hear the end of it."

"The idea. The very idea." William's fingers dug into Bill's shoulders.

"Hey. Hey, quit."

"Boys," Emily said at the bathroom door.

Bill wrenched away from William's hands. He stood at the door. "What'd I do?" He crossed his hands over his thin chest. "What'd I do to the little baby?"

"Get out. Get out of here, both of you."

"I didn't mean. . . ." Tim began.

"You heard your father," Emily said softly, stooping to the broken glass.

Bill opened the screen door wide, letting it slam behind him. He stood outside and slammed it a second time before he started around the driveway.

"Bill!" William shouted.

"Leave him alone," Emily said.

"He hit me first," Tim said. "I didn't . . ."

"Go on, I said go on." William whispered.

Tim shrugged. He opened and closed the screen door with elaborate carefulness.

At the sink, in the quiet cabin, Emily turned. "That was quite a display," she said.

"I know. I'm sorry."

"You're with them so little, I would think . . ." Emily bit her lips. "You're always after them."

"I'm not always after them. It's just that. . . ." He was determined to keep his voice as soft as Emily's. "I know I've been a little upset. I know . . . ."

"Please, William. We don't quarrel. At least we don't quarrel."

"My God, Emily. My God."

"Please."

"A man shouldn't have to keep working things out, over and over again. You don't have to keep working things out."

She spoke so softly that William had to ask her to repeat. "That's what I mean," she said again.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"*What* do you mean?"

"Why are you afraid of the shark? Why are you afraid of the shark?" she asked, although he had heard her the first time. "No, don't touch me. No, No. *Why?*"

"I dreamed of a shark. When I was sick I dreamed of a great shark." He spoke quickly. If he spoke quickly perhaps he could say what he meant, not knowing what he meant. "It's bad not to be able to tell what's real from a dream. I don't want to be sick, Emily."

"Everybody dreams." Emily leaned hard against the sink. She looked small. "No, no," she said.

"I worry about the boys, I guess." William cleared his throat. "I guess I worry about keeping us together. And about dying." He stepped back from her. "I guess I want to hold on—whatever we have."

She was moving toward him now. They were like dancers in the room. "If you had faith," she said. "If you went to church with the boys and me. If you had *faith.*"

"I try. I try, Emily."

"You didn't try. You didn't give the Church a chance, not a real chance."

"We can't talk about it. You don't want to talk about . . ."

She wore the gray suit instead of the white one. "Not if talk means going to bed together. That's what talk means to you. You've been looking at me that way. You promised. Before God you promised.

"God damn," he said. "God damn."

"William, William, William," she said. "You're right," she said. "We can't talk together. But it's all right. It's perfectly all right. You're all right."

She patted his arm before she moved around him to the door. "I'm not a bit annoyed. We're fine." She seemed to speak sincerely. Her anger had been a light switched on by mistake.

And she was right, perhaps. They were probably fine. In a few minutes it was all right to follow the road past the dunes to the crowded beach and ocean. The beach fluttered in the bright wind.

Their umbrella was already up. Emily was paying one of the blonde young men for the chair and umbrella. Bill stood tall beside her. "Here I am," Tim yelled from the edge of the water. "Here I am."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Ready?" Emily smiled.

"I'm sorry about. . . ."

Bill turned his head.

"Everything's all right. Bill's fine. Forget it," Emily said. "Now are we all ready?"

But Bill did not want to go in the ocean. "I don't feel much like it," he said. "I guess I'm catching a cold."

"We'll go in together," Emily said. "Give me your glasses. I'll put them right here in my case."

"I don't want to, I told you."

"I'll race you," William said.

"We'll rent some of those rubber rafts," Emily said.

"I said I wasn't going. Are you deaf?"

"Mister. Mister Life Guard. Wait a minute, Life Guard. Emily moved across the sand to the scarlet Jeep, opening her beach bag that was covered with round plastic suns. "Help me, Bill. Help me with these."

Emily talked well. Emily talked easily. Together they sat on the sand with the rafts for a while. Tim was delighted with his raft. "Hey, keen," he said. He raced into the water and out again. "Shark, shark, I'm a shark," Tim shouted, and the mother of the toy doll child said, "Look at the big boy. Look at him run." "We should of got these before."

"*Should have,*" Bill said. "It's not *should of.*"

"The water's good," Tim said. "It's just as soft and good."

"Everybody's in," Emily said. "Maybe we'll all go in after a while."

And after a while they all went into the ocean. Bill lifted both hands to his temples. He removed his glasses slowly and handed them, slowly, to his mother. "I'll just put them right in here," she said. "They'll be safe as anything."

"I can't see much without those things," Bill said. "The man said *they* slipped up on you."

How does a father say, I love you? What does a man mean when he says I love you? William said, "Fine, fine."

They ran into the water together. For almost an hour they were a family with rafts near the shore. They lay on the rafts; they wrestled them; they dumped each other and themselves; they fought through the water up to air. Emily laughed a great deal. Tim shouted, "Wowie," and "Fab-O."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Once, when Bill squinted over his shoulder toward the curve of sea, William said, "I'm watching out." And Bill said, "I know you are."

The sea was a blue saucer. Gulls sailed. Sandpipers raced on tiptoes, and turned, their feathers ruffled.

"I'm cold, I'm really cold. Don't you think it's getting cold?" Bill asked.

"I think it's cold, too," Tim said. "In fact, I'm freezing to death."

"We'll get out now," Emily said.

"It's been fine," William said, his throat tight with worry or with love; and the afternoon and the evening washed quickly against him, almost too quickly to think about. It's been very fine."

After dinner they walked by the ocean, on the beach which was charted for them now with people to nod to, with dunes and lights to recognize. The shining mother quarreled with her toy child, but the waves snatched away most of her words: "Don't you know people will. . . . And don't you know you are. . . ."

"Is the shark gone away?" the child whined as the Travises passed.

The mother's teeth glowed as she smiled at the Travises. "Yes, yes, darling," she said, nodding. "They killed it, darling. All the sharks are killed."

"They killed it?" Bill skipped into step beside William.

"She said so. The lady said so." Tim ran into the water until a wave splashed his shorts. "Shark, shark," he shouted, tracing numbers with his flashlight.

Far down the beach driftwood fires burned. "It's pretty, isn't it?" Emily said. "It's like a carnival, isn't it?"

The beach was full of little sharks. Almost every knot of fishermen discussed their little sharks with the people who did not fish but merely walked the beach. "Sand shark." "White shark," they told the Travises.

"Golly," Tim said. "That woman didn't tell the truth."

"A storm's blown them in," one man said; and another said they had come in because the ocean had been quiet so long.

"As a millpond," Tim said.

"But that fellow this morning—he was a whopper. "Eleven feet long, anyhow."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Twelve feet, eighteen, twenty-four. He was forty feet off shore, twenty-five feet, he was in the trough of the second wave. He was last sighted at eleven; no nearer twelve-thirty; at two. The friendly men and women and children on the beach moved together among a variety of numbers. How many people saw him? How deep is it out there? Give me a number, any number. How high is the sky?

"I bet they know about him even in Madison, Kentucky," Tim said.

"You tell 'm," a man said.

One of the twins who lived in the blue apartment house guarded the largest of the little sharks. The boy and the shark were almost the same size, three feet tall, three and a half. The boy stood the dead shark on its nose and dropped it to the sand. The boy kicked the shark. "Do it again, Greg," his brother said.

The County Snakes had caught a hammerhead. "It's a god dam hammerhead," the boy in the red and white striped trunks said. He placed his palms on his hips.

"It's a fish," Tim said.

"Sure it's a fish." The County Snakes laughed, looking toward William.

"It's a fish, Tim," William said.

"They're killers." The boy in yellow trunks spit over his shoulder. "They smell you out."

The old lady said, "Lovely evening."

The lovely evening was very dark when the Travises returned to their dunes.

Lightning bloomed the sky a moment.

"It may rain," Emily said.

"I'm sleepy," Bill said.

"Me too." Tim yawned loudly.

"Beat you to bed."

"Oh no you won't."

At the front door William turned to study the sky a moment.

He was not Paul on the road to Damascus. He was only a man who had walked on the beach with his family.

But for a moment he was the sea. He was all of the oceans. The waters of his mind held a multitude of faces, from war and even childhood, even his mother—she was not dressed in fur: she wore

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a white voile dress and sat in a steamer chair, even the man at the Shell Station, his father and the boys, and Emily, Emily, Emily.

The oceans were one ocean. He considered the possibility of deafness. But he was not deaf. The wind sounded in the sky.

He did not say, "I accept the responsibility of being human." But aloud he said, "I wish you well." He spoke, perhaps, to the shark who swam somewhere, absolute, perhaps fully dark, perhaps evil. He was embarrassed at having spoken aloud.

"Goodnight, Emily," William said as she switched off the lamp above her bed. "Goodnight, boys," he said in the dark cabin.

"Don't let the bedbugs bite," Tim called above the partition.

William lay on his back, his fingers clasped behind his neck. The tent of the roof appeared and disappeared in the sudden lightning. He wondered if the flashes came at any regular intervals, but he did not consider determining their frequency by counting his own pulse, or Emily's breathing.

"We have two and a half more days." Bill's voice seemed to come from the rafters.

"I bet we can't go in tomorrow at all," Tim said.

"You can go," William said. "You may go."

"And the morning and the evening were the fifth day," William thought. He was making a kind of joke. It was a joke like "The millpond round my neck." The act of committing your family to the sea was a small act, no different, not much different from saying, "Goodnight, goodnight."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GRAEME WILSON

Translations from Hagiwara Sakutaro

The poetry of Hagiwara Sakutaro (1886-1942) is still little known outside Japan, but within Japan he is regarded as either the best or (by such conservative critics as prefer the quintessential and untranslatable Japanese-ness of Kitahara Hakushu) at least the second best lyric poet to have emerged since contact with the outside world was re-established exactly a century ago. But it is fair to add that even the Japanese, whose nerves are tougher and whose hearts more lonely than any else I know, tend to regard Hagiwara's spirit as "too black," his work as a "blaze of darkness."

The general policy of the Meiji regime (1868-1912) was to promote that integration of "Western learning and the Japanese spirit" in which they saw the best future for Japan. In the poetic field the immediate result of that policy was a flood of imitations of European work. This New Style Poetry (Shintaishi) *abandoned traditional Japanese poetic forms, the five-lined* tanka *and the three-lined* haiku, *to produce Japanese versions of Shakespeare, the English Romantics, Goethe, the French Symbolists and even Longfellow's* "Hiawatha." Shintaishi *experimented very tentatively with substituting for the traditional literary language derived from Chinese models* (bungotai) *the actual language spoken by the Japanese. But even its most daring experiments were still patterned out of lines of five or seven syllables, the so-called seven-five metrical rhythm* (shichi go cho) *which was regarded as natural to the Japanese language.*

Hagiwara's early poems were, inevitably, all in tanka *or* haiku *form; but in 1913 he began to produce those unmistakeably modern poems on which his lasting reputation rests. His first book,* Barking at the Moon (Tsuki ni Hoeru), *appeared in 1917. It made an immediate impact, involved a brush with the Imperial Censor over two allegedly "corrupting" poems, and is still accepted as his most characteristic work. The poems were, in fact, precisely that successful combination of Western and Japanese ele-*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ments at which the Meiji policy-makers had aimed. Hagiwara was the first Japanese poet to produce work which, while indisputably part of the Japanese lyric tradition, made entirely natural use of untraditional form, untraditional language and untraditional metric rhythms. But the originality of his poetry lay not simply in being the first successfully to escape from the bonds of the past. It contained also an element of music never before heard in Japanese prosody; and it reflected, in images of startling beauty and unprecedented violence, an unexampled picture of the terror and loveliness of the world.

Having abandoned not only traditional forms, language and metric rhythms but also their associated stock of traditional poetic ideas, Hagiwara is sometimes criticized for a lack of intellectual content and, in particular, for an uncritical acceptance of the Pathetic Fallacy. Though his dislike of mixing poetry with metaphysics is very much in conformity with the Japanese poetic tradition (which, from the time of the First Imperial Anthology of 905, set its face against the didactic Chinese tradition best exemplified in the eighth-century poems of Yamanoue no Okura), it is equally relevant to stress that poets are not concerned to maintain logical or philosophic consistencies; and that lyricists of Hagiwara's humanistic (or, rather, animistic) sympathies might well not think that Fallacy fallacious. "I have been taught," wrote Fujiwara no Tameie in the mid-thirteenth century, "that the composition of poetry does not depend upon breadth of learning; but arises solely from the heart." Hagiwara shared with generations of his predecessors the view expressed in Pascal's dictum that the heart has reasons reason does not know.

Hagiwara's middle-period poetry, notably that in Blue Cat *and* To Dream of a Butterfly *(both published in 1923), confirmed him as the best poet of his day; but his later work (such as that in* The Ice Island *of 1934) contains imagery organized into something close to argument, a surprising re-employment of that literary language from which he had led the escape and a consequent silencing of his earlier singing quality under the clanging of* bungotai. *In the increasingly nationalistic atmosphere of the pre-war years, these developments were praised in Japan as signs of a more "masculine" manner; but there can be little doubt that they represent a retrogression. The best of his later work was not found, or published, until after his death.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It is clear, I think, that Hagiwara is not merely one of the greatest poets of Japan (a land, it has been said, whose street-signs would get into the national anthologies of most other nations) but also a poet of world significance; one whose marrying of the traditional Japanese lyrical intensity characteristic of the tanka *to the freer expression and longer forms characteristic of Western tradition contains lessons, still largely unlearnt, for poets working in both traditions. Hagiwara possessed, to a literally painful degree, the poet's one essential gift: to see first and to feel first what all can see and understand once it has been shown to them. It is, to my mind, totally irrelevant that he revealed so dark, so terrible a beauty. The nature of reality is the nature of reality: it will not alter merely to comfort us.*

MURDER CASE

There sounds a shot of pistol
In the faraway sky; and then
A pistol-shot again.

Two pistol-shots; and my
Detective dressed in glass
Warps in from that clear sky,
Vitrescent but to find
Behind the window-pane
He takes such pains to pass
The floorboards cut from crystal.

Between the fingers wind
Ribbons of blood more blue
Than words for blue contain,
And from the glazen dew
That glints like cellophane
On that sad woman's corpse
A chill chill cricket chirps.

One morning of an early
November, dressed in glass,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The sad detective, surly
From sadnesses, came down
And, where the two roads cross
To quatrify the town,
Turned. At his point of turning
An autumn fountain waited.

Already isolated
In knowingness, he only
Can feel the real bereavement,
The long slow wrench concerning
Identity's decay.

Look, on the distant lonely
Acres of marble pavement
The villain, quick as silver,
Glides silverly away.

GREEN FLUTE

Over the evening field
The elephants, long-eared,
Troop slowly into night.

The yellow evening moon
Limps up from afternoon
To stand at last revealed
Clear yellow but yet bleared
By waverings, the slight
Wind-winnowing of the light.

Girl in this evening scene,
Are you not saddened by
Its seep of loneliness?

Here is a little flute
Whose music is pure green.
Blow on it gently, sigh

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Along its hollows. See,
Its quavered cadences,
Its shaky melody,
Call down from that clear sky
A cold, an absolute
Quintessence of distress.

From some far sea of yearning
A ghostliness appears.
With slow appalling pad
It lurks towards us, turning
More nasty as it nears,
Seeming at last to be
A cat without a head
That staggers in the dead
Black shadows of this sad
Unseemly cemetery.

Girl, I could easily
In such a place concerning
Grief and the end of day,
Grief and the night returning,
To death's menagerie
Stagger away.

TO DREAM OF A BUTTERFLY

The butterfly, small-faced and ugly-faced
With black long feelers, weightily let spread,
Like papers in the room, its large thick wings.
I came awake, and in my lone white bed
Quietly, quietly let the dream be traced
Back to its larva, its belittlings.

Back to that autumn where my griefs begin;
A lorn dusk saddened as the lights subside,
An old house rotting and a crying tot,
The helpless soul of a small child that cried

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Like some damp frog from grass run riot in
The rotting garden of a house on rot.

In that child's heart the most heart-rending things
Seemed to be soothed by those small lights that gloom
Edges of distant water; and I cried
Through long long hours of dream.
In some new room
A butterfly shakes out enormous wings,
Spreading, like papers, their thick whiteness wide.

DAWN

From pain of long disease
The face is spider-webbed.

Below the waist the ebbed
Flesh has contracted to
Thin shadow-shapes, and these
Shaped shadows peter out
In nothings, in grey dream. . . .

Above the waist there sprout
Things bushy, things that seem
Like brambles of bamboo.
The rotted hands are thin
And every piece and part,
Lips, knees and nails and heart,
Are smashed and battered in.

The moon is up today,
The day-moon's in the sky.
Its dawnly feeble ray,
Dim as a hand-lamp, glows
Weak as from over-load
And somewhere far away,
Lifting its muzzle high,
A huge white dog gives tongue. . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

From desolation wrung,
Its desolation flows
Along the empty road,
Cry upon howling cry.

SEASIDE HOTEL

As though afloat upon
The coast-woods of red pine,
Far off, as far away
As shimmering can shine,
Sombre, the combers shone.

How, bathed in that far glow,
Dare one in passage pray?
How serve with hurried prayer
That shiningness, that slow
Sea-pulse which robes the bare
But bright-as-shoulderbone
Beaches of Echigo?

Finishing supper alone
In the underwater gloom
Of the hotel livingroom,
Suddenly things came right.

I rose; turned on the light.

IN THE MOUNTAINS

October, at the fading of the year,
Waits for my prayers and silences.
The birds and fishes disappear
Into their fasting distances
And autumn flowers fade. Their colours seep
To lend the whitening air an opal shine.
Nothing, not even prayer, dare run too deep.
Touch but a Bible, it turns argentine.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JOHN SIMON

Theatre Chronicle

THE THEATRE SEEMS TO HAVE become self-conscious about its laggardliness. It has rightly been accused of trailing behind the other arts: and though, frankly, being behind music and the fine arts may be one of the few points in its favor, catching up with the movies would be all to the good, if only the theatre could do it spontaneously, easefully, without that self-awareness that always characterizes writers to whom innovation is more important than writing. And if it only knew which way is forward.

Nowadays, forward tends to mean diving headlong (I use the metaphor advisedly) into sex, nudity, and aberration. The pinnacle of this so far (and at this writing I haven't yet seen *Oh! Calcutta!,* which may delve deeper, or, at any rate, lower than anything hitherto) was an ephemeral little item called *Che!* (Where, one wonders, would the avant-garde be without the exclamation mark?) Written by a twenty-nine-year-old West Indian, Lennox Raphael—but one who has lived in New York many years, or, in any case, long enough to learn the uses of publicity—it was preceded by a feelthy-whisper campaign heralding the performance of real live sexual intercourse right before the audience's eyes. Moreover, *Che!* was being done at the Free Store Theatre on the Bowery, a place that looks *louche* enough to suggest one of those dives in pre-Castro Havana where, indeed, not plays but players were mounted.

Whoever had heard about the promised goings-on and could afford the tickets that came up to $10, crowded into the previews. The drama critic of *Time* was there with Alan Brien, the former London drama critic turned columnist, and both reported rather despondently that the proclaimed intercourse did not come off. To be sure, the management had announced that coitus would occur only when the actors felt like it—presumably so as to preclude prosecution under the Fair Trade Act. From other preview-goers I gleaned the same doleful refrain: "No penetration!" Came the opening night, and so scarce were tickets that, even as a critic, I was given only one seat, despite the danger of autoeroticism to which this was exposing me. There were bleachers rising on three sides of the acting area, and in the middle of the front row of the center section sat, once again, the *Time* critic. Not far from him was Irene Papas, the actress, flanked by two very young hippies, one of whom she kept clutching as things got steamier. The theatre was swarming with men wielding still or film cameras, most of them from news media that were, clearly, not going to use this material except perhaps for office orgies. A man from Channel 5 later

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

boasted that they had even got the striped cat that crossed the stage during the copulation scene.

After the bleachers were full to bursting, the sporting event commenced. *Che!* has four characters: El Presidente (ostensibly LBJ), who is nude except for a belt and an Uncle Sam hat; Che Guevara, who is dressed in something halfway between fatigues and hippie gear, which he removes when a climax is in the offing, though for mere rising action he just takes out his penis; a Nun, who sometimes wears only a coif and sometimes only panties, and, briefly, neither; and an androgynous creature, Mr. Mayfang, who, apparently, represents the C.I.A., and is enacted by a girl in a sort of silver-shimmering space suit with transparent plastic cups over her breasts. In the center of the acting area stood a studio bed, a few other props were scattered about (such as an urn for simulated defecation), and in one corner stood a cage in which sat a man in a gorilla suit who occasionally strummed a guitar.

Che! consists of the characters' spouting two kinds of dialogue at one another. Either pseudoprofound, e.g., "Put your pain in mine.—I adore conscience!" or "My identity will resort to violence"; or sexual and pseudowitty, e.g., "I am up to my arse in lovers," or "I am the Bride of Christ.—The chosen clit?" or "You taste like colored rain.—I used to taste like tequila.—The vintage has gone sour." (The last during oral intercourse.) Mostly there are gleeful word games: "After a while even the sun goes down"; or "Don't bite the cock that feeds you!" or "You deserve the best.—His deservation is a ten-minute head." ("Head," for those unacquainted with the *argot,* means fellatio.) One gathered that the author is illiterate from this "deservation," from "Pulling rank will impotentize your perfection," from "Responsibilization is futile," and, in a general way, from the entire play. For the recordization, I'd like to quote a few more samples of Raphael's wit: "I came like hurricane and rain.—It is your Latin background." "Nobody sleeps with an ape for kicks.—I'd sleep with a rhino for a fuck." And here is some of Raphael's imagification: "His tongue is a laser," or "Passion is cunning and blue."

The action consists of an endless series of simulated copulations and minor perversions in performance groups of one to four, from autofellatio to the Nun being mounted by the gorilla (well, let's be generous, that one might be a major perversion), from the men alternatingly performing fellatio on each other to continual grabbing of penises which, however, invariably fail to rise to the occasion. During the supposed *real* sex scene, the gorilla plucked his guitar with simian soulfulness, the lights turned discreetly purple, and Che and the Nun went at it hammer and tongues. But for all their dedication to Thalia (or, in case of malfunction, is it Melpomene?), and for all the aphrodisiac dialogue abetting them ("That's better than my Jesus Christ!" the Nun exclaims), and for all the cameramen's frantic leaping about the bleachers in pursuit of better angles (giving one intima-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tions of a stampede by a herd of rutting chamois), the performers failed: the Nun remained, like the script, impenetrable, Che's organ proving, like the author's pen, a flaccid tool. The play ends with El Presidente shooting Che in a fit of sexual jealousy. The critic of *The Village Voice* devoted several pages to the play, which he found a serious drama about the sexualization of politics. The police, on the other hand, found it "public lewdness, consentual sodomy, and dissemination of indecent materials to minors." The show was closed after some three performances (no doubt to the grief of the *Time* critic who was so determined to get his kicks even by double proxy that he sent his girl friday to a press conference at which the penetration was to be conclusively consummated—but, once again, wasn't); the actors and staff were arraigned, and the case comes up in Criminal Court shortly.

If I go into all this in such detail, it is to show you what a ludicrous pass we have come to. Needless to say, theatre of this type elicits condign criticism: most of the remarks I heard or read were lamentations on the ugliness of all four visible performers (the man in the gorilla suit may have been as beautiful as the Apollo Belvedere, but never disrobed), or accusations of "fag" and "dike" hurled at Che and the Nun for never actually making it. It would all be funny if it weren't so sad; or sad, if it weren't so funny; or both sad and funny if it were not so imbecile. After the police closing, one more private performance was given for a group of assorted notables to solicit signatures on a petition in behalf of the play; very few, I gather, were obtained. But *Che!* has made theatrical history, and those involved with it will be able to make political if not theatrical capital out of it once the legal skirmish is over.

The type of sexuality that is particularly in vogue is inversion; oddly enough, other aberrations have hitherto seldom been heard from, though no fewer than two stage versions of Sade's *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* have been announced for May. In the homosexual field, most aggressive was Neal Weaver's *War Games.* This concerns John, a young American draft evader, who lives in Toronto with Ted, a somewhat older draft evader, in happy carnality. The dialogue runs, more or less, like this:

> Ted, come to bed!
> I don't want to fuck you, if that's what you mean. Besides, it's not good for you to do the passive bit all the time. If we're going to make love, I want you to do some of the work.
> You mean you want me to . . . ?
> Yeah. Do you think you're up to it?
> I'll try anything once.
> But one thing: take it easy! You're a *big* boy. . . .

Well, John's father, a general up for chief of staff, comes to get the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

boy back—not to more acceptable social patterns, for in this play even the reactionary older generation is remarkably understanding, only to the States, so the general's promotion won't be imperiled. He will fix it for John and Ted to avoid both the army and prison. But John refuses, throws off his clothes, throws a fit, puts on a faggot scene, and finally drives the general out with a shaving-soap spray. Later Mom, a very sympathetic, warm but tough Southern lady, appears and tries to bring John back by more loving means. Still no go, though he softens. Then Sandra, a teen-age chum arrives from Washington; she is ready to move in with John, whose draft-resistance has broken down her resistance.

Sandra, a sexy little Jewess, spends the night on the floor, while the boys share the bed. But when Ted goes off to work, Sandra wins John back to heterosexuality, or at least bisexuality. As they sit on John's bed, munching their cinnamon breakfast buns and exchanging confidences about their sex lives, John and Sandra kiss. Commenting on her taste, he exclaims: "Cinnamon!" She: "You too!" He: "You want to fuck?" She: "I'm in your bed, dumb. What more do you want?" Soon John is proposing marriage, but Sandra wants to begin by merely living with him. There is a stormy parting scene with Ted: John would like to hang on to him at least as a big brother while he'd be living with Sandra in another apartment down the hall. But Ted is disgusted with him, and John turns, for not very clear reasons, against Sandra. So he calls up Barbara, a girl he had a garish affair with back in the States. He persuades this messy neurotic who specializes in miscarriages and attempted suicides to leave college and come up to Toronto to live with him, while he works at a new-found job as a librarian. It turns out that he cannot live alone, that he is not an upright young homosexual of principles, but a scared and screwed-up little bisexual operator. The play provides a generous helping of male nudity, but no female flesh.

The audience at the final preview of *War Games* was almost entirely composed of homosexuals. They would have preferred Don Warfield, as John, not to have his face and back covered with acne. They appreciated Jean-Claude Vasseux's acting as Ted, but seemed to find him insufficiently sexy for a bedmate. As for Mom and Dad, they loved her, hated him. They liked the broadminded landlady ("You don't mind?" asks John when she catches him in bed with Sandra, and she replies, "Of course not; if I don't object to the boys, why should I mind girls?"); they even liked Sandra, played by a girl called June Whitehill who already looks and acts as repulsive as Ruth Gordon. I suppose they felt that any female so unsightly and mannered will contribute handsomely to the yearly nationwide increase in homosexuality. But the most interesting phenomenon was that, despite their relishing of individual scenes, the spectators, as they filed out of the theatre, commented negatively on the play as a whole. This

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

contrasts significantly with the homosexuals' enthusiasm for a play like Mart Crowley's *The Boys in the Band,* which is by way of becoming a world success on stage and screen. Crowley's play is quite a bit better than Weaver's, but not all that much. What, then, is the difference? And why does even so utterly execrable a homosexual play as *Geese* continue to pack people in, whereas *War Games* closes? The answer lies chiefly, I think, in the intense sentimentality of homosexual audiences. Though they like an occasional bit of *grand guignol,* they prefer plays like *Geese,* in which homosexuality is presented in a gently jocular and sweetly naive light; or *The Boys in the Band,* where bitchiness and promiscuity, mincing faggotry and male whoredom, though present, form a colorful background against which the principal characters can stand out radiant in their lovableness and pathos. What they don't like is a play like *War Games,* where the homosexual protagonist turns out to be an unsympathetic character who ignores his lover's warning: "Love only works when you want for the other party exactly what he wants for himself; otherwise the war games start all over again." The play is left stranded by the audience it chiefly caters to, not because it is a bad play, which it is, but because it presents the seamy side of homosexuality (not even the sado-masochism, which can be endowed with Satanic stature) as its central exbihit. The typical homosexual audience being easily as dishonest as the typical heterosexual one, we may look forward to yet undreamt of falsifications of reality, even in its marginal aspects.

The other major dramatic topic, as I mentioned in my last chronicle, is the Negro problem. I shall not try to enumerate all the productions that came and went, although some of them had their hearts in the right places and were, even if unimpressively written, powerfully acted. Perhaps the most conspicuous of these was *The Gingham Dog,* dealing with the breakup of an interracial marriage. This play by Lanford Wilson, a successful and rather interesting off-Broadway playwright making his Broadway debut, was particularly disconcerting because it stirred up considerable passion, venom, and effective verbal violence, but all to very little purpose. We were never shown how Vincent, a young architectural draftsman and escapee from the provincialism of Kentucky, met Gloria, who has fled the Harlem ghetto to become a black agitator, and why they got married, and how they could possibly have lived happily together at first. Nor do we see how their marriage foundered, though she accuses him of mindless and soulless work for a firm that erects high-rise tenements, and he charges her with concentration on extremist causes that freeze the capacity for simple connubial warmth. We witness a terrible clash of people who mean very little to us, and whose fighting sheds very little light on the day-to-day problems of an interracial marriage. The second act consists of a futile attempt at reconciliation during which the process of estrangement is, rather unincisively and undramatically, rehearsed.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

We part from this parting couple with as little regret as illumination.

There was, however, a good performance by Diana Sands as Gloria, with the actress—at last!—playing a part well within her narrow range; as Vincent, the gifted George Grizzard seemed to be less dead center, particularly in his second-act drunk scene in which he became rather more cute than the part can bear. As his surface-sweet, bottom-bitter sister, Karen Grassle functioned remarkably well in a stock part. Alan Schneider's staging did the job—no more, and no less. But during the long, hysterical clash of the principals, Schneider allowed Sands and Grizzard to pick up each other's speech rhythms, which increased the monotony of this excruciating scene. To me, I must confess, the most interesting thing about the evening was the well-dressed, middle-aged, middle-class Negro couple I sat next to. During the most *sotto voce* sequence on stage, the man unwrapped a piece of hard candy that must have been sheathed in two dozen layers of crispy cellophane, and provided crunchy chewing for an entire scene. I had a vision—or audition—of new audiences, like this somewhat ill-at-ease couple, coming into the theatre and adding their ineptitude and decibels to those of the noisily unruly old-timers: soon it will become even harder for playwrights in New York to get a hearing.

The Negro Ensemble Company put on an estimable play by Lonne Elder III, *Ceremonies in Dark Old Men*. This is the family chronicle of the Parkers, an impoverished Harlem family: the mother, who was the provider, is dead; the father's barbershop has no clients; the two sons are layabouts, though the younger is a successful shoplifter; and the daughter has inherited the mother's job as breadwinner for the entire family. When the sons get mixed up with a Harlem crime czar and start making illegal booze for him, a brief prosperity is followed by tragedy. Though the white man whose world is unaccepting and unacceptable to the blacks is never actually seen and seldom mentioned, his shadow falls on the proceedings. Both in atmosphere and technique, the play derives from O'Casey (as several reviewers have noted), but what makes its naturalism tinged with sentimentality—again as in O'Casey—seem viable and valid is that it explores the life of Harlem in a way relatively new to our stage (James Baldwin and Langston Hughes did not push sociological dissection even as far as Elder does); the novelty of the setting and situations compensates for the outmodedness of the approach.

The production by the N.E.C. (it is about to reopen with a different cast at another theatre) was well directed by Edmund Cambridge, and, with the exception of Arthur French, smoothly acted. There were particularly fine performances from William Jay as the elder son with a green thumb at the still, and Douglas Turner as the father—an ex-hoofer living partly in a fantasy world, again rather like a typical O'Casey character. The most exciting thing about the play was to observe the profoundly cathartic effect it had on the Negro audience—

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

something that held out hope for a revival of other values in the theatre than those provided by the currently fashionable experiments in mindless sensationalism.

The avant-garde has been busy on all fronts, including Broadway. John Guare, whose *Muzeeka* was one of last season's best off-Broadway offerings, made it uptown with two short plays under the joint title *Cop-out*. Both plays are satires on the police; one on today's, one on yesteryear's; but what is really attacked are social mores that give rise to such a sinisterly farcical force. Unfortunately, though individual lines and even scenes were funny, sometimes pointedly so, the whole thing was too facile and irresponsible, too loose and inconsequential, to register in a theatre such as the Cort, even though, by Broadway standards, it is quite small. It would seem obvious that a certain type of sloppy but engaging play, with few characters and much cabaret-style slapdashness, may look lively and apt in a tiny off-off-Broadway showcase, but disappears into the flies and wings of a theatre of even medium build.

There is, however, another and more serious problem here. It is illustrated more clearly by the case of Israel Horovitz, another of the talented few in today's avant-garde, whose double bill, *The Honest-to-God Schnozzola* was put on in a small off-Broadway theatre. The plays still managed to look small, padded, and insignificant. What they were, in fact, were single gags elaborated to untenable length, and in slipshod fashion, at that. In one of them, a crass American tourist plays a practical joke on a dumb, innocent fellow American in a German night club: the whore he fixes him up with turns out to be a boy in drag. Around this nucleus revolves a contrasting of American banality with German decadence, the whole thing on the intellectual level of *Cabaret*. In the other play, a president-dictator set up as absolute ruler of this country proves, when his supporters examine him more closely, a robot that can utter only the words, "It doesn't matter." This sort of thing went out, I had thought, with the radio plays of Archibald MacLeish. Ventures like these must be the products of careless haste, or the yield of some bottom drawer in which the juvenilia of a suddenly successful playwright have been quietly rotting. The idea is to get something on the boards post haste and at all costs—or, rather, at no cost, except, of course, to the spectators. Avant-garde plays seem to lend themselves to being tossed off, but the truth of it is that good ones take at least as much thinking and writing as plays of any other genre. Which reminds me of a remark of Dr. Johnson's someone applied to Leonard Melfi, another of this group of playwrights. It had something to do with not trusting a man who has written more books than he has read.

But there is one kind of avant-garde play that tends to be truly distasteful: this is the "underground" farrago that gets produced above ground and proceeds to attitudinize as if it were serious drama. An

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

item of this sort is Ronald Tavel's *Boy on the Straight-back Chair,* which was produced by the American Place Theatre, highly praised by Clive Barnes in the *Times,* and proclaimed the best American play of the season by the *Newsweek* critic. Ronald Tavel is a former script-writer for Andy Warhol (if those films can be said to have scripts, let alone writing, in them), who for a while was the main playwright of the Theatre of the Ridiculous, and specialized in plays with homosexual themes. The *Times* turned one of these, *Gorilla Queen,* into a moderate success; what really made Tavel respectable was Richard Poirier's printing his ghastly little play, *Kitchenette,* in the *Partisan Review.*

Boy on the Straight-back Chair purports to be a study of a young sex-killer in a typical town in rural America, and further purports to make significant comments about the deleterious narrowness and smugness of such a community. Its chief innovation consists in the fact that the play is delivered more or less as an oratorio (there are actually some rather dreadful folk-rock songs included in it), with the characters moving about very little, and the young killer standing almost throughout on a center-stage chair. Given this format, the sheer quality of the language becomes all-important. But Tavel has only one trick up his short sleeve: bad puns. A character utters the words "takes stock of me," and, presto, another chimes in with "there's that talk about them stockpiles again," whereupon another declares, "We've got them stockpiles, too," and still another inquires, "What did you say about piles, Stella?" A typical one-liner runs "My brother was one of them guys that flew over Hiroshima and Nagasaki—or Teriyaki, whatever they're called"; or: "He'd have made that maid if maid there was to be made." We hear of a novel entitled "Hair Today, Gone Tomerkin," and we get faggoty-campy in-jokes like a reference to a forgotten movie Tarzan, Buster Crabbe, as "Buster Scab." And now imagine some three hours of this stuff—one hopes James Joyce made it to heaven, because if not, he is sitting in the other place locked into a bare room with a loudspeaker blaring out the collected works of Ronald Tavel. One of the small-town mothers who act as chorus in *Boy* addresses the audience: "My little girl has come to foul play, even as you have come to a foul play." It is not even an honest play on words: a girl does not come to foul play, she meets with it. Otherwise the statement is unexceptionable.

Joseph Papp's Public Theatre put on a stage version of Vladimir Nabokov's *Invitation to a Beheading* by Russell McGrath. This is one of Nabokov's gloomiest and least successful novels, and the faithful but uninspired transposition casts a further pall of its own. The director, Gerald Freedman, has turned the Kafkaesque humor of the novel into corny vaudeville routines, including such devices as having the characters' faces sown on (thick painted-on sutures above and below the ears). And not only the faces: the hero's wife has her breasts sown

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on, too—so that the play looks like a plastic surgeon's nightmare. Almost all the characters are made to mince, nance, hop, skip, sputter, shlurp, and otherwise dehumanise themselves: it is Kafka's *Metamorphosis* in reverse with a bunch of ex-beetles scampering about.

Back on Broadway, repertory uttered its last gasp with the APA-Phoenix's final production, entitled, yes, *A Production of Hamlet.* Final in more ways than one, the APA's deficit having become so great as to preclude New York seasons in the foreseeable future. Though it is sad to see a repertory company go, it is not particularly sad to see *this* repertory company go. That *Hamlet* was a ruthlessly trimmed-down version of the play, based on the 1603 Quarto, in modern costumes with campy overtones. I can see using that text for its stage directions, possibly even for its reordering of the sequence of scenes, but I cannot see swallowing it whole. Sensationalism was the aim—and keeping the production values down to a Noh-play minimum of performers and scenery; besides saving money, this directed the attention squarely to Ellis Rabb's Hamlet. Rabb, the APA's artistic director, has a small talent for fruity supporting parts, very little personal appeal, and boundless megalomania. He has presumed to play everything from King Lear to Pantagleize, and now Hamlet. He also co-directed.

Rabb's Hamlet is effete, his delivery rushed and perfunctory, his emphases (when he had any) carefully thrown on words where they do not belong, his movements ungraceful. His favorite device is to go down on his knees, which he does once every five or ten minutes, as if to administer shoeshines to his fellow actors; his second-favorite one is to lie down and stretch out completely. If you like your Hamlet recumbent or semirecumbent, Rabb is your man. It is a Prince with just enough stature for the Second Gravedigger. The rest of the cast is on a par with Rabb, which explains the company's main problem. While they had Rosemary Harris in their midst (and I never considered her a great actress, but she is *an* actress), there was something holding APA together, a standard to aspire to. When Ellis Rabb sets the diapason, the only kind of song to come out is swan.

The new musicals are nothing to crow about, either. *Dear World,* a clumsy adaptation of *The Madwoman of Chaillot,* is a third-rate show that Angela Lansbury tries hard to carry on her second-rate shoulders. *Canterbury Tales,* an import from England, is a reduction of Chaucer to something a little lower than the absurd: first to the level of Nevill (there, inadvertently, I have written a Coghill lyric!), and below that, to uninspired rock-'n'-roll. Only the décor by Derek Cousins had genuine wit and charm, and if ever the old gag about a musical so poor you come out humming the scenery had applicability, this was the time. Against such competition, *1776,* a musical about the signing of the Declaration of Independence, with music and lyrics by Sherman Edwards and book by Peter Stone, managed, through sheer, genuine mediocrity, to appear a towering achievement. It is an uneven

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

piece of work, wavering in tone between moderately respectable historical comedy and brash, often unfunny, vaudeville. Yet it has its felicities, not the least of them the excellent staging by Peter Hunt (who, as a former lighting designer, must have had something to do with the remarkable lighting credited to Jo Mielziner), intelligently understated costumes by Patricia Zipprodt, and quite a few expert performances, some of them even in very small parts. It is, however, significant that *1776* is being played without an intermission: admit one chink, and the whole unstable mixture falls apart.

Was there nothing truly good, then, this second half of the season? Well, under the aegis of the Tréteau de Paris we saw a more than creditable production of Audiberti's *Quoat-Quoat,* in which the old-timer Jacques Dumesnil and the talented newcomer Jean-Pierre Leroux performed winningly under Georges Vitaly's direction. In the last analysis, Audiberti may be only a wordmonger, but he is surely one of the loveliest wordmongers of them all. On Broadway, a play about drug addiction, *Does a Tiger Wear a Necktie?,* though far from satisfactory, revealed in its author, Don Petersen, a playwright of—I shudder to use that word, part cliché, part boomerang—promise. But what else is one to say of someone who writes exceptionally fine scenes in a generally unrealized play?

Lincoln Center Repertory Company put on *In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer,* by the German documentary playwright, Heinar Kipphardt. This is based on the transcript of the Oppenheimer security hearings, but, of course, isn't documentary theatre in the strict sense because there can be no such thing. Kipphardt has selected, edited, telescoped minor characters together, added a few monologues and changed a few minor facts (the American production also changes some names and makes a few cuts); what comes out is commotion recollected in tranquillity with some added editorializing. But there is enough reality left, enough of a sense of urgency, of problems of grave and universal concern, to make us sit up and listen to most, indeed all of it. The production was a replica of his West-Coast staging by Gordon Davidson, who retained several members of his original cast. Though there were some weak links, the general level of acting was rather high. Joseph Wiseman, while unable to divest himself fully of his sinister quality, was a quietly mysterious Oppenheimer; Ralph Bell was the very embodiment of a liberal lawyer full of bearish shrewdnesses; and as I. I. Rabi (here called Jacob Lehmann), Tony van Bridge was nothing short of sublime. Ruth Speirs's translation worked swimmingly, Davidson's direction was tidy though occasionally overemphatic, and there were appropriate film clips and slide projections. The one demurrer against this production (and, to some extent, against the play itself) might be its involving of the audience in a facile complicity with its somewhat self-righteous liberalism. The anti-Oppenheimer position is given nowhere near equal forcefulness

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and appeal—partly, to be sure, because it is a less appealing position. Nevertheless, the spectacle of smug burghers and impromptu liberals heartily applauding every pro-Oppenheimer epigram—when God only knows what they were thinking at the time of the actual hearings, if, in fact, they were thinking at all—is not particularly inspiriting.

Best of all, perhaps, is the off-Broadway double bill, *Adaptation-Next*. First comes a one-acter by Elaine May, representing the life of an average American as a television game called "Adaptation," in which the contestant hops from square to square, forward or punitively backward, according to how well he adapts; if he can get to the unidentified security square (secretly *we* learn that all squares are that), he wins. The various squares become stages in the life of Contestant, who, under the vigilantly jaundiced eye of the Games Master, acts out a career of bumbling, operating, lousing up and making out from cradle to grave. The game conceit is, unfortunately, not carried through consistently; and the play subdivides into typical Nichols-and-May skits, which, moreover, have a faintly 'fifties ring to them. Still, there are good bits among the cabaret clownings.

The second play on the bill, *Next,* by Terrence McNally, a playwright I had never found satisfactory or even savory, proved a veritable delight. A fat, middle-aged assistant artfilm-theatre manager is being put through a ferocious Army physical and psychological examination by a repellent, robot-like female sergeant. The questions and uncouth palpations to which this skittish, indignant little man is subjected are absurd and humiliating, and he fights them off as best he can, with a patter that is dignifiedly ludicrous, hilarious and pathetic. We get a funny and fierce picture of the madness of the system, and a touching one of the vulnerability of a fastidious individual (McNally seems to have a homosexual in mind, but does not say so). The dialogue (or monologue) is consistently, cumulatively uproarious in its seminaturalistic, semipreposterous way, the humor and horror escalating *pari passu*. James Coco's performance is flawless down to the least sidesplitting or heartbreaking detail, and Elaine May's direction makes every point more pointed. *Next* is the funniest—and meaningfully funniest—play I have seen in some time, and if McNally can keep piling comic play on play as he here manages to pile comic line on line, he may yet graduate to Parnassus.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CHARLES W. MILLARD

David Smith

FROM MARCH 29 UNTIL MAY 11 the Guggenheim Museum presented a major retrospective of the sculpture of David Smith, comprising one hundred twenty-seven works in all, thirty of them *hors catalogue*. The exhibition occupied all but the bottom ramp of the museum, the top ramp being opened to the public for the first time. Based on one's experience of the large Calder show several years ago and of the sculpture from the Joseph Hirschhorn collection, one expected that Smith's sculpture would show to advantage in the Guggenheim's difficult space, which seems to lend itself better to three-dimensional than to flat objects. Such was not the case. The pieces shown on the lower ramps suffered two fates. The larger standing pieces seemed constricted by the low ceilings and intimate spaces of the ramp, and were often flattened into silhouettes by the Museum's inflexible lighting which focused on the walls rather than on the sculpture. The smaller, more open pieces—those often referred to as "drawing in space"—also read as silhouettes, although this was not as damaging to them as to the solider sculpture, and were inflated in substance by the fact that the light reflecting off the warm white walls behind them tended visually to fill in their voids, making them seem bulkier than they actually are. Increasing this effect was the necessity of installing the majority of the pieces in the curbed and curved exhibition areas against the outer walls of the Museum, making it impossible to walk around them and emphasizing their pictorial nature. As one approached the larger pieces on the top ramp, precisely the opposite effect occurred. As the ramp of the Museum opens out into the vast space immediately beneath the dome, the broadening of the ramp, the opening of the space, and the flood of diffused daylight suddenly increases to gigantic proportions the scale of the exhibition area. The effect on works of art is to make them seem insignificant, and large as were the pieces exhibited in this area, they were sufficiently separated from each other—each being isolated in a bay of its own—and sufficiently dwarfed by the architecture, to be greatly diminished in impact. In addition, these pieces, the very ones one wanted to see from the distance of the opposite ramp, were truncated by the ramp's parapet, as the smaller pieces, raised on pedestals, were not. Both of these effects have implications for Smith's sculpture that we shall discuss later. Suffice it to say here that the Museum's spaces tended to make everything look the same, to reduce to a common denominator the tremendous range of quality and means represented in such a large sampling (roughly one-fifth) of Smith's work.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

That range of quality and means, the Protean effect of Smith's *oeuvre* considered as a whole, is central to an understanding of individual works. At the very outset of his career as a sculptor Smith announced the problems he was to attack, and those problems remained relatively constant for the more than thirty years of his career. In *Head* (1932) they are almost all stated—the relationship of the piece of sculpture to the ground on which it stands; the allied problem of elevating or floating sculptural forms; planarity, which for Smith involved the juxtaposition of forms at right angles to one another; added surface effect, in this case painting; and the relationship of solid to linear forms, the latter represented in *Head* by painted lines. Almost twenty years later, in *Zig IV* for instance, Smith was wrestling with these same problems on an expanded scale. The elevated surface of *Zig IV,* angled to the ground in much the same way as the spine of *Head,* serves as a planar-geometric base for freer, more calligraphic sculptural events, as does the spine of the earlier piece. The painted linear patterns of *Head* are translated in *Zig IV* into three dimensions and become the edges of curved planes, but the use of painted patterning to call attention to the surface is similar in both pieces. Finally, Smith has achieved the transition of *Zig IV* into the ground with wheels, which emphasize its floating quality, while *Head* comes down to a circular peg or pin, which can be seen simply as a wheel turned on its side. Smith's was an art of process and problems—the same problems re-thought, re-worked, worried over in new materials and on new scales. If it was not an art of solutions, or rather resolution, it was one that split the situation of sculpture wide open and finally made possible, by its exploration of relevant problems, the development of a viable modernist sculpture.

As its appearance at the Guggenheim abundantly emphasized, Smith's is perhaps the most pictorial and illusionistic sculpture ever created. Its pictorialism is evidenced by its planarity and, particularly, its frontality, both qualities that persisted in his work despite occasional excursions into more complex and three-dimensional configurations. Such an early work as *Widow's Lament,* by no means unique in Smith's *oeuvre,* is about as two-dimensional as a free-standing object can be, its pictorial allusion made explicit in its frame-like construction which contains the sculptural equivalent of a picture plane. Four small boxes pierce that plane, simultaneously occupying space in front and in back of it and, since one can look through them, implying spatial extension at right angles to the frame. In fact, the boxes are extremely shallow, and the effect of spatial extension is illusory, therefore pictorial, and abetted by the "diagonals" of the small connecting pins. The fact that the spatial extension implied by these boxes is both in front of and behind the main frame of the piece evidences Smith's direct debt to Cubism. Over thirty years later, in *Cubi XXVII,* one of his last pieces, Smith was still concerned with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this frame-like pictorial construction, now increased in size and distilled in structure to the point where it is generally seen in architectural terms as a gate. Nevertheless, it preserves the same physical shallowness, the same dependence on right-angled planes, and even the same use of rectangular boxes set at right angles to the main frontal axis of the piece. If its physical three-dimensionality is greater than that of *Widow's Lament,* its visual three-dimensionality is less, partly because the box forms are incorporated into the peripheral structure of the piece rather than piercing it in the middle. One feels of *Cubi XXVII* that it is essentially a two-dimensional form pushed back in space until it takes on three-dimensional substance, a feeling reinforced in fact by Smith's use of silhouette spray drawings to work out the compositions of the *Cubi* pieces.

The importance of silhouette in reading Smith's sculpture is another evidence of its pictorial quality, since silhouette is a wholly two-dimensional characteristic. The *Cubi* series, which at first glance seem the bulkiest of all Smith's sculpture, are increasingly easy to read as silhouette since their welded edges are turning black in contrast to the polished stainless steel of their principal plane surfaces, and hence tend to enclose those surfaces in shadowy outline. Whether this is an effect anticipated by Smith is not clear, but it is one that he stated regularly during the development of his work. The "drawing in space" pieces, for example, are almost pure silhouette. *Hudson River Landscape,* perhaps the greatest of these pieces, is an extremely flat steel construction the lines of which enclose shapes that are related to one another two-dimensionally across the main axis of the piece in much the same way that Pollock's drips tended to enclose shapes across the surface of his canvases, shapes that in at least one instance he cut out. If Pollock had continued to cut out these bounded shapes he would quickly have arrived at an almost exact equivalent of Smith's open constructions. Smith's genius for spatial illusionism is also evident in *Hudson River Landscape* in that lines that are in fact diagonal across the main axis of the piece read visually as diagonal into space—that is, as recessive—a fact which, combined with one's awareness of looking through the piece, makes it seem infinitely more three-dimensional that it in fact is. The fact that one's experience of Smith's sculpture is so often that of looking or going *through* something, as one looks through the imaginary frontal plane of a picture, is in itself telling and in direct contradistinction to the usual sculptural experience of going *around* or being *in* something. To return to the matter of silhouette, the levelling out of effect apparent in the Guggenheim installation is not without its point if one considers, say, *Hudson River Landscape* and *Cubi XXVII.* In the former, the sculpture flattens out when its linear cage is seen against a warm, advancing background such as that at the Guggenheim, while in the latter the polished steel surfaces tend to dissolve within the black

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

outlines of the welded edges when the piece is seen in full, diffused daylight. In both cases the tendency is toward flatness. One realizes, finally, that Smith was working with bounded shapes, not with space, and that although his sculpture exists in space and evokes much greater space than that which it actually occupies, it is not a sculpture that uses space as a basic, active, or three-dimensional element. The great majority of Smith's sculpture is essentially relief, and in this he worked wholly within his Cubist-inherited framework.

Because flatness was of such importance to Smith, surface also became primary, and he dealt with it in a variety of ways, emphasizing it or dissolving it as his needs dictated. From the outset he painted many of his pieces, often in different colors or with some sort of applied pattern. While color itself tends to emphasize surface, being an applied skin, the enamel paint Smith used increases that emphasis, and patterning increases it even more. It does this partly by calling attention to activity that is happening on the surface and partly by contradicting and suppressing shadows thrown by light which would normally tend to emphasize volume and three-dimensionality. In many of the unpainted pieces, rust serves somewhat the same function, and in the *Cubi* an equivalent effect is achieved by polishing the steel. Early in his career Smith tended to use small areas painted different colors, often bounded by painted lines, both the lines and the shapes responding to broader contours of the piece. Later, however, he moved more toward painting different sides or different elements in different colors, or toward painting entire pieces the same color, or toward using a sort of stippled or dry-brushed patterning in two colors that reads as a unified effect. Sometimes the coloristic effect of the juxtaposition of different metals in their native finishes was enough. In every case, colorism was used to increase two-dimensionality. Sometimes painted shapes were thus used, rather than hue, increasing the spatial ambiguity. In *Tank Totem VII,* for instance, the painted white square within the concave tank-head directly contradicts the round concavity, snapping it forward again into two dimensions. That this square is irregular, diminishing toward the top, merely increases the complexity of the illusion. Similar spatial dislocations sometimes occur based on the optical effect that a line passing behind a larger defined object or shape sometimes seems bent or displaced, an effect noticeable in Smith's work in *Three Planes* of 1960-61. Toward the end of his life, when Smith was working in stainless steel, he polished the surfaces of his pieces in broad, irregular linear or circular patterns. This drawing, replacing painted lines or surfaces and manipulation of the fabric of the sculpture in drawn configurations, reflects light in such a way as to dissolve the surface on which it appears and make its exact spatial location uncertain. It hints that Smith was looking for a way beyond simple flatness and spatial ambiguity to total denial of the substance with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which he worked, toward a kind of evaporation of the object. One wonders if this in any way reflects the search of Smith's friend Jules Olitski for similar effects at the same time.

Smith's urge to deny the massiveness of his material is evident in another of the problems that run through the entire course of his work, that of relating sculpture to the ground on which it stands. There are two aspects to this problem relative to Smith's sculpture, one of the creation of a form without direct reference to the human body, and the other the floating of sculptural form. Both tend toward the use of materials to create a maximum effect of weightlessness. Obviously the two are integrally related in that if vertical gravitational pull can be visually overcome, the resulting effect of floating forms will suppress human allusions. Smith coped with getting his pieces into the ground in a variety of ways, including creating an artificial ground plane on which the pieces were constructed vertically and at right angles to the basic plane, and by using pin-type supports or wheels or pedestals integral to the piece. Most often he simply resorted to one sort or another of legs, thereby accepting, rather than attempting to get around, the human allusion. The most obvious and most satisfactory solution, simply to run the sculpture along the ground, was employed by Smith at the outset of his career (*Reclining Figure,* 1935; *Aerial Construction,* 1936). As with so many problems, he found, but did not stick with, a solution, returning again and again to different aspects of the same problem and different essays at a solution. One need only compare *Suspended Figure* of 1935 and *Wagon I* of 1964 to see earlier and later versions of the same problem. It has usually been said that toward the end of his life, when Smith seems finally to have accepted this lateral mode of composition, he was following the lead of Anthony Caro, whose pieces had been composed this way from the moment he began making constructed sculpture, and whom Smith knew quite well. While it may well have been Caro who finally made Smith *aware* of this solution, it is apparent from the work that it was inherent in what Smith himself was doing from the beginning. As for the floating of forms, *Suspended Cube* of 1938, one of Smith's best and most successful pieces, announces a solution. In it, the cube is suspended by two curving metal rods, floating through an opening in the plate it pierces. Although it quite clearly keeps the pictorial pierced plane, this is one of Smith's most three-dimensional pieces in that the two curving rods make it a completely all-around object of continuous transitions. There are no front and back, no isolated views, as in much of the other sculpture. Although floating forms ceased to be a major problem with the open sculpture, which could be raised on pins or legs and spread themselves out in sweeping lines without having to cope with the sensation of strong gravitational pull, Smith once again encountered the problem when he began using bulkier forms. Table-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

like pedestals and inclined planes, as in *Zig IV,* were one way. He even tried hanging sculpture, as in *Parallel 42,* one of Smith's least successful pieces, but since he was uninterested in movement this was hardly a viable solution. Finally, he settled on painting or polishing to dissolve the substantiality of his steel, the attempt to achieve weightlessness thereby becoming a matter of surface rather than a problem of construction.

Taken as a whole, Smith's work is astonishing in the range of problems it enunciates and wrestles with, and in the vitality it evidences—Protean is the proper word. It is just this quality, and similar qualities in the man himself, that give rise to the Smith legend, a legend that one feels Smith himself would have had us believe. It is the legend of the Rabelaisian Smith, Smith the gourmet, the lover, the drinker, and it is a legend that carries over into the work, as when one hears how Smith was like a giant throwing massive pieces of steel into the air where they hovered permanently in great works of art. For all the truth it may contain, the legend obscures more important truths than it reveals. Perhaps no sculptor, certainly none of recent times, has been as thoughtful, not to say intellectual, an artist as Smith. This shows not only in the constant restatement of problems and the hesitancy in accepting solutions, but in the appearance of series of works developing specific problems as well as in the iconography of the sculpture, particularly that of the earlier pieces. This latter aspect of the sculpture, its allusiveness, is dealt with in detail in the catalogue of the Guggenheim show by Edward Fry, and while it can be made too much of it certainly cannot be ignored. Far from being a sort of gruff and mindless machinist, Smith comes across in his work as a deeply introspective personality to whom sculpture meant the constant working over of difficult and antipathetic problems, and to whom its creation was an intensely intimate affair involving an unusual amount of personal catharsis. This intimacy, which often verges on preciousness—preciousness in a positive, not a pejorative, sense—is revealed particularly in the way Smith's sculpture is best seen, and partly by the fact that it is so little at home in the Guggenheim. One thinks of Smith's as an outdoor sculpture but, except for his own home at Bolton Landing where masses of it could be assembled in one place and the effect was not of single pieces so much as of an entire lifetime of work, this is not so. Smith's sculpture is human and domestic in scale and looks best indoors, the smaller early pieces in domestic interiors, the later, larger pieces in more spacious museum interiors. Both lose by being placed outdoors individually, either against architecture, or in an urban environment or natural setting. Despite the size and power of many of his works, Smith was not a monumental sculptor. The innerness, intimacy, and containment of his work extend to even the most massive pieces and nowhere did he achieve the expansive scale that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

characterizes a monumental art. Most of the work demands to be touched, even embraced, and throughout much of it run the ambiguous and perplexing strains of intense physicality and almost total disembodiment.

The real accomplishment of the Guggenheim exhibition was not only that it brought out many of the inner characteristics of Smith's sculpture noted here, the problems he faced and the ways in which he faced them, but that it clarified the relationship of his work to other contemporary sculpture and to the art of his time in general by presenting a large portion of it at one time in one place. Whatever the limitations of his work, Smith was clearly the finest sculptor America has yet produced, clearly the finest sculptor working anywhere in the world during most of his creative lifetime, and clearly the most important sculptor of his age, the one who made possible the achievement of younger men now working here and abroad.

B. H. HAGGIN

Music and Ballet Chronicle

THE PAST SEASON WAS MADE NOTABLE and exciting by conductors' operations and achievements of a technical and musical distinction not heard with such frequency since the years of Toscanini and Cantelli. They began with the performances I reported on last time—Colin Davis' and Giulini's with the New York Philharmonic, Abbado's *Don Carlo* at the Metropolitan; and they reached their climax in the ones in which Pierre Boulez, conducting the Philharmonic, repeated the demonstration of his phenomenal powers that he had given with the B.B.C. Symphony in 1965. The marvelous sound of the wind chords, their precision of attack, shape and release, in response to unemphatic gestures that were like mere reminding signals—these testified to his possession of an ear in balancing the orchestra and a power of magnetic compulsion as phenomenal as Toscanini's and Cantelli's, which produced a marvelous clarity of orchestral texture like theirs. Moreover this extraordinary playing was done in a musical progression in which every sound fell into place naturally and inevitably, a statement of the work that resembled Cantelli's in the way it seemed not to be produced by human effort but simply to come into being and assume its emerging shape of itself.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It was in this matter-of-fact way that Boulez got the Philharmonic to produce—as if it were the easiest thing in the world—the unbelievably precise, beautiful-sounding and powerful playing it did in a performance of Stravinsky's *Sacre du Printemps* which had not only clarity, continuity and tension like those of Stravinsky's own performance, but the additional incandescence of a virtuoso orchestra's operation under a virtuoso conductor. It was one of the high points in a lifetime's experience of such operation; and it provided one of the high points of my musical experience, making me aware with new impact of the magnitude of Stravinsky's work, and leaving me newly moved by those concluding words in his account of it—that whereas Schönberg, Berg and Webern, in their innovations, "were supported by a great tradition . . . very little immediate tradition lies behind *Le Sacre du printemps.* I had only my ear to help me. I heard and I wrote what I heard. I am the vessel through which *Le Sacre* passed."

One thing to mention about this eventful performance that concluded Boulez's final program is that in its breadth and weight and power it was strikingly different from, and superior to, his swiftly moving, tautly dynamic recorded performance of *Le Sacre.* Similarly the performance of Debussy's *La Mer* that concluded Boulez's first Philharmonic program was quite different from, and superior to, the one on the record: in addition to its extraordinary clarity of texture it had the continuity of outline and tempo—except for a frenetic acceleration followed by an excessive retardation near the end of the last movement—that the recorded performance doesn't have (it also doesn't have audible string basses). This made it a performance which in incandescent orchestral virtuosity, tonal beauty and communicative effect ranked with those of Toscanini and Cantelli; but Boulez did one thing that was startlingly new—an inflection of tempo (not specified in the score) that imparted enchanting grace to the four measures before No. 26 in the second movement.

The quiet matter-of-factness of Boulez's operation was deceptive in more ways than one: not only in the fact that it was made possible by hard work at the rehearsals, but in the fact that the man who gave this appearance of simplicity and matter-of-factness in his conducting reveals complexity and eccentricity in his quoted ideas about music, in the music he himself has composed, and even in the programs he conducts. The program that ended with Debussy's *La Mer* began with *Jeux,* which the superb performance couldn't make anything more than the succession of mannerisms of the matured Debussy orchestral style that it is. And it included Alban Berg's Violin Concerto, which communicated as little to me this time as when Koussevitzky first performed it in the thirties, and Varèse's *Intégrales,* a work in another idiom I find uncommunicative. And *Le Sacre* ended a program which opened with five beautiful Purcell Fantasias for strings, but

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

then offered Stravinsky's Symphonies of Wind Instruments, which impressed me as an ugly piece when Stokowski first played it in the early twenties, and has impressed me in exactly the same way whenever I have heard it again; and Webern's Six Pieces Op. 6, in which I could appreciate the subtle orchestral coloring and the occasional atmospheric effect of the phrases I found expressively meaningless. One hopes that in later visits Boulez will relax his zeal as a proselytizer of the bad twentieth-century music (the good has been accepted) and apply his powers to the good music of the two centuries before the twentieth.

Berg is for me the composer of the sound-track for the action of *Wozzeck;* and another great event of the season was the performance of this work that Colin Davis conducted at the Metropolitan—especially the orchestral performance that he made clearer-textured and more impassioned than Böhm's in the earlier productions. The cast was headed by Geraint Evans in the title role and Evelyn Lear as Marie—both excellent singing actors and effective in their parts, though Evans didn't produce the effect that Hermann Uhde did with his mere physical appearance—the enormous black eyes in the ghastly white face—and Lear was too piquantly beautiful and had too cultivated a diction for a coarsely sluttish Marie. Paul Franke repeated his superb Captain; Donald Gramm contributed an effective Doctor; Robert Nagy was the credible Drum Major. The light colors of Caspar Neher's sets again seemed to me unsuited to what one saw and heard; but the beer garden and barracks are more appropriately designed; and these two scenes were staged well by the production's new director, Henry Butler.

Still another outstanding achievement was young Seiji Ozawa's performance of Berlioz's *Requiem* with the New York Philharmonic—completely assured in his co-ordination and control of the forces distributed around the hall, and imparting impressive effect to the music with his pacing and shaping of it, the fine playing he obtained from the orchestra, the clarity of texture he achieved in the unattractive-sounding singing of the Collegiate Chorale. Leopold Simoneau's tenor voice, its beauty astonishingly undiminished, rose without strain to the B-flats in the *Sanctus.*

Giulini, returning to conduct the Philadelphia Orchestra in a Hurok subscription concert, employed its marvels of tone and sensitive execution in a performance of Schubert's Fifth, the best of his early symphonies, that had a suitable relaxed grace; a brilliant performance of the Overture to Rossini's *Semiramide;* and a performance of Brahms's Second in which the orchestra demonstrated its high regard for him by executing with unfailing beauty of sound every italicized detail of what it must have regarded as a mistakenly overemphatic statement of the work. Giulini may think this is the right way to deal with Brahms; but it is the wrong way even with the pretentiously bombastic First Symphony, and certainly with the lyrical Second.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And Zubin Mehta, finally, conducted the Metropolitan's new production of *Il Trovatore* with the technical assurance and musical skill he had exhibited in his earlier *Aida, Otello* and *Carmen,* confirming my impression—after the performances of symphonic music I have heard on records—that he deals most effectively with opera. His authority appeared not to extend to Leontyne Price, who slowed down and distended the climactic phrases of Leonora's fourth-act aria as I cannot recall anyone else doing—though up to that point she had shown more regard for shape of phrase in the deployment of the voice that was agreeable and steady in the high notes in which it didn't have the luscious beauty of its lower range. Grace Bumbry's voice lacked the weight and dark color required for the role of old Azucena; James McCracken's quavering tenor made his Manrico almost as much a strain for the listener as for him; and though Sherrill Milnes, the Count di Luna, did some of the evening's best singing, his *forte* high notes no longer had the glow they had had in *The Barber of Seville* a few months earlier. My eye again had difficulty with Price in the role of a white character; and with Bumbry it had the additional difficulty of the absurdity of the enormous gray wig over the slim face and figure of a young girl. But these were minor as against the huge scenic constructions of Attilio Colonello, seemingly molded out of halvah, which cluttered the stage, ranking with the other horrors presented at the Metropolitan of Rudolf Bing. The principals' costumes were passable; but the ones for the chorus had the Colonello stamp—the most vivid in my memory being the quasi-Moorish affairs worn by the soldiers who in the encampment scene leaped to the front of the stage and menacingly pointed enormous red and yellow dinner candles at the audience. And one detail of present-day staging contrived by Colonello with the director of the production, Nathaniel Merrill, calls for mention: during Ferrando's narration to the soldiers in the opening scene I became aware of creaking noises behind the backdrop, which were explained when backstage lighting revealed, on a high platform behind the backdrop, Azucena's mother being burned at the stake.

But in this sort of distracting gimmickry the Metropolitan is outdone by the New York City Opera, which began it twenty-five years ago and has carried it to its present high point in the monstrosities of staging contrived by Frank Corsaro. Between his *Faust* of last fall and his *Rigoletto* of last spring he published in *The Times* an article in justification of his practices that revealed a mind as irresponsibly vulgar as the taste revealed in his productions. The librettos of the operas, he contended, were bad originally; and there was nothing sacred about them that forbade the changes necessary to make them "apply to a modern experience," without which "there is no point in putting [the works] on," and for lack of which they have no interest for "the young people [who] are not going to the opera these

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

days." It's true that the libretto of *Rigoletto* includes a great deal that is absurd to a rational mind; but it's also true that this libretto with its absurdities is the one Verdi chose to set to music, and that if one wants the music one must take the libretto with its absurdities. Specifically if one wants the music Rigoletto sings in his confrontation with the courtiers who abducted his daughter one must take with it the absurdity embodied in the words he sings—that this man, who in the presence of these courtiers mocked Monterone's anguish over the Duke's seduction of his daughter, now expects them to be affected by *his* anguish over *his* abducted daughter; that after denouncing them as the "*cortigiani, vil razza damnata*" that they are, he whimpers that they are all against him, and then, beginning to weep, appeals for their human sympathy. Evidently the young people who are the majority of the standees these days in the audiences that pack the Metropolitan for *Rigoletto* deal with this and the other such built-in absurdities of *Rigoletto* as everyone else does—by ignoring them and concentrating attention on the music that is their reason for being there. And actually those absurdities remain in Corsaro's production: what he does is to surround them with new—and, whenever possible, sensational and shocking—details of stage action which distract the mind that has learned to ignore and not be distracted by what it is familiar with.

As it happens, there is nothing absurd about the opening scene of *Rigoletto;* nor does it need any change to communicate what Verdi wants to establish about the Duke and his court. And clearly this *is* communicated credibly to the young people standing at the Metropolitan by what they see and hear going on at the elegant ball in Eugene Berman's marvelous "*sala magnifica nel palazzo Ducale*"; whereas what Corsaro replaces it with—an orgy in which the participants tear each other's clothes off and roll on the floor in embrace, and this absurdly crowded onto Jose Varona's narrow raised platform on a small part of the large New York State Theater stage—distracts some spectators with thoughts of whether the dissoluteness of a sixteenth-century duke and his court did really exhibit itself in the form presented by Corsaro. Again, for the young people at the Metropolitan it is understandable that Rigoletto's reaction to Monterone's curse at the climax of the scene should be his frightened exclamation, "What do I hear! Horror!" and that his first words at the beginning of the next scene should be "The old man cursed me!"; whereas some spectators at the New York State Theater must wonder at Rigoletto's treating Monterone's curse, in the first scene, as a matter for laughter, and after this must wonder even more at his treating it in the next scene as a matter serious enough for him to get staggering drunk as he mutters, "The old man cursed me!" And they must be struck by his suddenly restored sobriety in his duet with Gilda, his suddenly renewed drunken state when he encounters the courtiers. Moreover the young people

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at the Metropolitan have learned to ignore in this scene such implausibilities as the house at the remote edge of town in which Rigoletto hides his daughter being located next door to Ceprano's palace, the comings and goings of the Duke and Rigoletto, the blindfolding of Rigoletto. But it is impossible for some spectators at the New York State Theater not to be struck by the implausibly complicated set with its profusion of entrances and windows, on which the characters' popping in and out reminds them of a Mack Sennett movie. The beginning of the next scene—the Duke's lament over his loss of Gilda as he sits alone in a large salon of the palace the next morning, followed by the courtiers' report to him of their having abducted her the night before and brought her to the palace—requires no change to be credible for the young people at the Metropolitan; but what Corsaro changes it into is questionable for some spectators at the New York State Theater. What they see there is the Duke in his student's disguise returning from Rigoletto's house in the middle of the night to what looks like a room in his private apartment and singing *"Ella mi fu rapita"* and *"Parmi veder le lagrime"* to the courtier in attendance as he exchanges his student's jacket for a dressing gown; and then the abductors reporting their abduction not just to him but to a gathering which includes court ladies and two leashed dogs to whom the Duke tosses bits of food. This is questionable for those who are aware that the words of the Duke's *"Ella mi fu rapita"* and *"Parmi veder le lagrime"* are unmistakably words addressed to himself, not to someone else, and who perceive that the court gathering in the middle of the night is not only improbable itself but incompatible with the subsequent action—Rigoletto's entrance in his jester's costume, the page's entrance with a message from the Duchess, Monterone's being led to prison—which indicates that the time of the scene is the morning after the abduction. And whereas the young people at the Metropolitan see Gilda rush to her father in the nightdress in which she was abducted, spectators at the New York State Theater are startled to see her come out of the Duke's bedroom resplendent in a costume of red and gold. As for the last scene, the young people at the Metropolitan see Gilda look through the specified crack in the wall to observe the Duke's dalliance with Maddalena; but spectators at the New York State Theater are offered the absurdity created by there being no wall, so that Gilda and Rigoletto are as visible to the Duke and Maddalena as the Duke and Maddalena are to Gilda and Rigoletto. Nor is this all: Corsaro has Gilda arrive with her father in a boat on the left, in which he later sends her away while he makes an exit at the back of the stage; but when she returns dressed as a man it is not in a boat on the left but on land on the right.

These distracting goings-on, the night I observed them, drew attention away from a musical performance conducted well by Gabor

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ötvös, with Louis Quilico a sonorous Rigoletto, Patricia Brooks singing well as Gilda, Pierre Duval having to strain for the Duke's high notes, and Robert Hale an impressive-sounding Sparafucile.

As for *Prince Igor*—which Julius Rudel was quoted in the program as saying he had long "dreamed of doing" because of its "marvelous array of colors in the orchestra . . . the great range of emotion . . . the tremendous variety of people. . . ."—it turned out to be musically feeble and dramatically non-existent, making it clear that Rudel's real reason for producing it was the mere availability of a production designed by Will Steven Armstrong for the University of Cincinnati. This wouldn't have been reason enough even if the production had been a good one; and actually it was a bad one in what might be called the wooden-slat style of stage design. In addition the performance suffered from the Corsaro direction (Galitzky, after carrying off a girl, returned buttoning his trousers) and the appalling choreography of Ron Sequoio amid which Edward Villella did his customary leaps and spins. Rudel conducted well; and there was good singing by David Clatworthy as Igor, Roy Samuelson as Galitzky, William Chapman as the Khan, and Joy Davidson as his daughter.

The program-annotator for the American Opera Society's performance of Bellini's *La Straniera* in Carnegie Hall managed to connect its two protagonists with "Antonioni's exiles and Camus' Stranger"; but actually they are merely the leading soprano and tenor in a Bellini opera with an unbelievable plot contrived to provide them with the occasions to exhibit their voices. In this instance the Bellini melodic writing in which the voices were exhibited was for the most part beautiful and affecting; and while the tenor voice of Amadeo Zambon lacked the warmth and ease which the music called for, the soprano voice was that of Montserrat Caballé, not extraordinarily beautiful, but deployed in long phrases which were inflected with taste and style that made the singing extraordinarily distinguished. In addition, Vincente Sardinero used a good baritone voice impressively; and Anton Guadagno's conducting held soloists, chorus and orchestra together in a musically effective performance.

The season's outstanding occasions included the appearances of the pianist Ashkenazy at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where he played Mozart's Rondo K.511, Schubert's Sonata Op. 53, Schumann's *Kreisleriana* and Chopin's Ballade No. 4; at Carnegie Hall, where he played Beethoven's Sonatas Op. 10 No. 3 and Op. 57 (*Appassionata*) and Chopin's Barcarolle and Sonata Op. 58; and at Philharmonic Hall, where he played Beethoven's Concerto No. 5 (*Emperor*) with the New York Philharmonic under Ozawa. A year ago I wrote that in the Chopin sonata Ashkenazy adhered to tradition in playing the first movement as though it were marked *Allegro appassionato*—as against Cliburn's performance in accordance with Chopin's actual direction,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Allegro maestoso; what I must report now is that the impassioned performance this time was volcanic; and it followed a volcanic performance of Beethoven's *Appassionata.* But even these performances remained within the limits of coherent shape and beautiful piano sound; and Ashkenazy operated with this hair-raising intensity only where it was suitable—which is to say, not in the superbly paced and shaped performance of Beethoven's smaller-scaled Op. 10 No. 3, the beautifully phrased one of Mozart's rondo, the elegant and impassioned ones of Chopin's Fantaisie and Barcarolle, the now energetic and powerful, now lyrical one of Schubert's sonata, the richly imaginative one of Schumann's *Kreisleriana.* (I must mention, however, that two encores at these recitals, *In der Nacht* and *Traumeswirren* from Schumann's *Fantasiestücke,* were rushed through in a way that lessened their expressive effect.) As for the Beethoven concerto, Ashkenazy's performance had many details that were freshly thought and vivid and exhibited his unfailing musical intelligence; but I didn't get an impression of an integrated conception of the first movement as a whole—which may have been a failure on my part. An additional pleasure was the way Ozawa kept the orchestra's playing in constant musical relation to Ashkenazy's.

I heard another superbly fashioned performance of Chopin's Sonata Op. 58—this one by Michael Rogers at Rockefeller University. And at the Metropolitan Museum Misha Dichter's steadiness of tempo worked effectively not only in the *Allegro giusto* opening movement of Schubert's Sonata Op. 143 but in the extraordinary Andante and the finale. But it made impossible the rhetorical expansiveness called for by Beethoven's *Appassionata.* On the other hand, Christoph Eschenbach's playing was damaging to a Bach Partita, Beethoven's Sonata Op. 110 and Schubert's posthumous Sonata in A with its seemingly wilful distorting explosiveness.

The Guarneri Quartet's concerts at the YM-YWHA and the Metropolitan Museum were additional outstanding occasions—with especially notable performances of Beethoven's Op. 18 No. 5 and Op. 132; but there were some disquieting moments. In Beethoven's Op. 130 at the YM-YWHA I heard an expressive overloading of phrase that I was sure I hadn't heard in Cambridge a couple of years earlier, and that I couldn't go along with. Nor could I go along with the slowing down of the first movement of Beethoven's Op. 59 No. 2, at the Metropolitan, for an expansively expressive treatment of the second subject; and I found this treatment of the second subject even more objectionable in the first movement of Mozart's K.499. Also it was a mistake, in my opinion, to conclude Op. 130 with the Great Fugue Op. 133 instead of the finale that Beethoven substituted for it. Beethoven should have the right to his second thought here as in *Fidelio;* and listening to the Great Fugue I was struck by its lack of any relation to the movements of Op. 130 in style, substance and expressive

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

content; whereas the finale Beethoven substituted for it goes with those movements perfectly. I think other groups are right in performing Op. 130 with this finale and the Great Fugue by itself, and the Guarneri Quartet would be wise to do the same.

I was able to see only one program of the Harkness Ballet, with three new works. Benjamin Harkavy's *Grand Pas Espagnol* offered, with music by Moszkowski, a feeble use of Spanish style that made the dancers look embarrassingly foolish; Rudi von Dantzig's *Moments,* unlike Balanchine's *Episodes,* presented nothing of interest in its movements to go with the fragmentary and, for me, meaningless Webern music; John Butler's *After Eden,* to music by Lee Hoiby, was yet another of the assemblages of straining contortions that Butler devises in endless profusion for the hapless dancers. The program ended with a piece originally in the repertory of the New York City Ballet, Todd Bolender's *Souvenirs* to engaging early music by Samuel Barber—its humorous points much too heavily italicized in the performance it got this time. To judge from this one program, the Harkness Ballet is still what Clive Barnes described in one of his rare moments of accurate perception: "a company of splendid dancers in search of a splendid ballet"—such splendid dancers as Elizabeth Carroll, Helgi Tomasson and Lawrence Rhodes, whom one regrets seeing in the mostly feeble or awful ballets of the company's repertory.

Balanchine's emergency method of dealing with the excessive physical demands which the six consecutive numbers of the new *pas de deux, La Source,* made on Violette Verdy and John Prinz was to end the work abruptly about half-way through the concluding waltz, which was disconcerting to both ear and eye. I expected him to try other methods; and when the piece was given a few weeks later it was combined with three numbers from the earlier *Pas de Deux and Divertissement* danced by Suki Schorer and a group of girls. One of these gave Verdy and Prinz a rest before their second solos and waltz; but this wasn't enough to enable them to do the entire waltz and then the finale of the earlier ballet; and so the waltz still had the damaging cut.

For the rest, Balanchine merely made a couple of changes in the village scene of *Don Quixote,* eliminating the brilliant Juggler's dance and replacing it with the Rigaudon Flamenco from the divertissements in the Court scene. I not only regretted the loss of the Juggler's dance but felt that the Rigaudon didn't fit into the village scene as well.

The other new works of the winter season were Jacques d'Amboise's *Tchaikovsky Suite,* to the Suite No. 2 for orchestra, and John Clifford's *Fantasies,* to Vaughan Williams' *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis.* It is inevitable that d'Amboise should, as a choreographer, think in the language of Balanchine he learned as a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dancer; and all one can ask is that he achieve something good of his own with that language. This time he has done so—not all the time, but in the outer fast movements of the work, and especially the first, with its exciting invention superbly contrived for the powers of a satanic-looking John Prinz and for the lovely style of Marnee Morris. (It isn't only the general Balanchine language that he uses here, but the peasant-style arm movements of Prinz in Balanchine's wonderful *Pas de Deux Mauresque* in *Don Quixote.*) The finale also is good, though a little arch and cute. But what d'Amboise contrives for the slow middle movement—danced by Allegra Kent and Francisco Moncion in alternation with Kay Mazzo and Anthony Blum—is less effective and convincing.

Clifford, in *Fantasies,* uses the Balanchine idiom in a way that Balanchine usually does not—which is to say, in a ballet with an idea. It is an idea of the kind Tudor is concerned with—the contrast between dream and reality in love; and Clifford's skilful invention for the two couples in his piece—Kay Mazzo and Conrad Ludlow, Sara Leland and Anthony Blum—includes Tudor-like details; but the result is a much more interesting piece than those Tudor has done since *Lilac Garden.*

Then there were the earlier Balanchine works with new dancers: *Divertimento No. 15,* with Suzanne Farrell (in the absence of Melissa Hayden) adding her seemingly effortless flow of supple movement to the beautiful contributions of Morris, Schorer, Sumner, Leland and Blum—the result being realizations of the variation movement and the Adagio that had one spellbound; *Allegro Brillante,* given a new look by Kent's exquisitely delicate movements; *Swan Lake,* with Peter Martins not only a superb partner for Patricia McBride but moving one with his dramatic expressiveness; *Ballet Imperial,* with Martins again a superb partner for dazzling Violette Verdy, and executing his feats of virtuosity with his contained power and elegance. And though I had seen *Firebird* made exciting by Verdy's extraordinary makeup and performance several times before, there were this year what looked like new details—new plungings of arms, new stabbings of legs, new intensities in other movements—that were evidence not just of her remarkable powers of technique, style and imagination, but of her unending work to produce their continuing development.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DON McDONAGH

Modern Dance Chronicle

POVERTY AND MODERN DANCE have been traditional traveling companions: everyone knows at least one fiscal horror story connected with a talented choreographer. What this past Fall and Winter season has demonstrated is that Modern Dance's creative vigor and its anarchic organization are not necessarily inseparable. With the astute aid of the much maligned Ford Foundation, the organizers of the "Festival of Dance 1968-69" assembled the largest modern dance season ever undertaken in New York, with fifteen dance companies appearing in three separate theaters for a three months' run.[1]

The successful proliferation of modern dance has in effect challenged one of its own cherished myths, i.e., that organization strangles creative talent. To some, notably the outspoken Anna Sokolow, organization is a four letter word, "evil"; but for most, the creative vigor has not been drained away, but given some belated support. The opportunity to perform in large houses for sustained periods before a sensitive audience affords choreographers and dancers the chance to gauge their work in the only meaningful way. Far too often modern dance has played to hard core university groups from whom ritual support provided the only sustenance. But there have been indications over the years that the "votaries of the dance shrine" concept was slowly being replaced with a more theatrical orientation, and that companies only needed a suitable organizational framework to attract dedicated cooperation. The Brooklyn Academy of Music, Broadway's Billy Rose Theater and New York City Center provided the houses and the "Festival of Dance 1968-69" resulted.

Quite properly the series led off with the Martha Graham Dance Company. Miss Graham is the senior performing dancer of the generation that succeeded the pioneers, Ruth St. Denis, Isadora Duncan and Loie Fuller. Now in the autumn of her performing career she brings to her works a hyper-charged theatrical presence but little dance fluidity. For the Brooklyn season she revived two dances absent from her repertory since 1953, *Dark Meadow* and *Errand into the Maze,* and the more recent *Alcestis,* last performed in 1962. They all plumb the wellsprings of myth in a way that has been Graham's traditional concern. *Dark Meadow,* the most potently evocative or the three, presents a cyclical saga of life renewal characterized by the piece's sections as, *Recurring ecstasy of the flowering branch, Terror*

[1] "The Festival of Dance 1968-69" continued under the name "American Dance Theater" at New York City Center from April 8-20 through May 6-25, with the following companies participating: Martha Graham, Paul Taylor, Glen Tetley, Talley Beatty, Pearl Lang and Don McKayle.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of loss, and *Ceaselessness of love.* The set, designed by Isamu Noguchi, Graham's longtime scenic collaborator, is a biomorphic Stonehenge. Three softly moulded black pillars of varying heights form a semi-circle with an inclined mound facing it on the opposite side of the stage.

Within the designated area a "primitive" chorus of men and women provide a backdrop of prancing, stamping movement to the principals: *One Who Seeks,* the sensuous *She of the Ground* and the deity-like *He Who Summons.* The piece remains erotically obscure but convincingly true to the shadowy laws governing its direction. Mary Hinkson was lyrical and strong in conveying the search for an *El Dorado* of emotional aspiration, and Matt Turney had the earth-bound serenity of the unquestioningly secure. Bertram Ross danced his overseer's role with a judicious balance of command and permissiveness. *Dark Meadow,* which came at the juncture of two creative phases in Graham's oeuvre, was an important transition piece and an excellent selection to demonstrate the Jungian conception of collective pre-rational experience that lies at the heart of her sensibility. She had exhausted the vein of American experience represented by *Appalachian Spring, Letter to the World* and *Salem Shore* and had not yet decided on the Greek classical myths for her next creative exploration. *Dark Meadow* is part of that concern with recurring and universal myth which runs throughout the Graham repertory, uniting her incursions into the specific mythology of various national groups. In the early nineteen thirties her researches into the archetypes were represented by works like *Primitive Mysteries.* As the American mythology of the frontier followed *Mysteries* in the late thirties, the Greek and Hebrew myths took their place after *Dark Meadow* in the fifties and sixties.

Errand into the Maze is her reworking of the Ariadne and Minotaur legend into a combat within the female heart. It is an interesting duet in which the female conjures up the frightening and symbolical Minotaur to torment herself, but carefully keeps him controllable at the same time. He dances throughout with his arms yoked to a giant bone across the shoulders. Thus while he can be frightening, he can do no real harm, and the girl learns to live with this insurgent from the interior. Clive Thompson was an excellent creature, with the right air of fawning menace complementing Helen McGehee's agitated girl. Miss Graham herself danced the central role in *Alcestis,* a brooding minor work that tells of love's redeeming powers in the snatching of Alcestis from death's embrace.

Following Graham, the companies of Anna Sokolow and Erick Hawkins each gave a series of performances. Hawkins offered one revival, *John Brown's Body,* an atypical narrative work which dates from the forties when he was a principal dancer with the Graham company as well as Miss Graham's husband, and a new work *Tight-*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rope which reflects his most recent choreographic concerns revolving about the study of bodily flow. A dancer of charm, but a choreographer with a severely restricted variety of movements, Hawkins has a passionate following which does not falter despite his production of a gently monotonous succession of highly similar dances.

Anna Sokolow is similarly one-track, but her subject is desperation. She is the voice of unreconstructed social seriousness and has clearly chosen the role of a contemporary Calamity Jane. She presented three works new to New York. *Tribute,* dedicated to the memory of Martin Luther King Jr., the most interesting, offered the spectacle of company formation movement that had a suitable honorific gravity. *Memories* (all of which appeared to have been unpleasant) left at its conclusion the boys and girls of the company staring with lobotomized dullness. "Steps of Silence" was another chapter in Miss Sokolow's seemingly unending serial of despair: the boys and girls who were unable to make meaningful connections with one another found themselves finally awash in the big city jetsam of blowing shreds of newspaper.

The good-humored Paul Taylor company followed with a welcome respite of mixed choreographic fare that featured the local debut of his work *Public Domain.* Deriving its name from the snippets of music, all in the public domain, that John Herbert McDowell finessed into a score of quick musical wit, the piece cleverly strung together a number of choreographic jokes. It was inconclusive but pleasant, like a rapid fire succession of one-liners—consistently entertaining but lacking durability. Dancers pursued lines of dance development aggressively, then suddenly lost interest only to pick up somewhere else, as Taylor jabbed softly and easily and hardly ever failed to score a laugh. To make a complete work out of it, though, he will have to make it peak and conclude logically. Right now it just stops. A dance which Taylor has studied and recast in its present telling mould is *Lento,* an elegiac work about dedication to an ideal; in this case the craft of dancing and creating dances. *Orbs,* which is Taylor's most ambitious dance to date and was premiered two years ago, continues to offer further insights into the borderline area of activity within, but not totally susceptible to, the control of human hands. Three of the four sections take place in a cosmological world of "planets" and "moons," and one in the here and now with dancers in civilian suits and dresses. It draws parallels between the determined orbits of planets and the less obvious but also ordained human orbits. Set to late Beethoven string quartets, the work appears to be the culmination of a line of choreographic exploration. Since its creation he has turned to casual humor (*Public Domain*) or to narrative of one form or another, as in the medieval morality dancelet *Agathe's Tale* and the story of dedication in *Lento.*

Next came the mixed means theatricality of the Alwin Nikolais

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dance Company. Nikolais is unquestionably one of the theatrical geniuses of our day though only time will tell how highly his choreography will be regarded. But whatever history's final judgment may be, there is no doubt that his composite of choreography, sound, decor, light and costumes (all of which he does himself) is one of the most consistently eye-ravishing events to be seen on the twentieth-century stage. *Tent,* a work which he offered in New York for the first time, was no exception. It was composed of five short sections, all of which were performed beneath or on top of a piece of cloth that was vaguely parachute-shaped. The nine men and women in the piece brought the tent on in a long limp file. It only achieved liveliness when they attached cords to it, and at the end it enveloped them. Between the tent's opening flaccidity and its final all-embracing mastery, couples met and parted, struggled and surrendered to its hovering presence. Murray Louis, Phyllis Lamhut and Carolyn Carlsen were featured, but really had little dancing to do as the choreographic element in this beautiful stage work was reduced to almost marginal importance. Nikolais is the Robinson Jeffers of Modern Dance, regarding man as a small part of the process of life, and by no means the heroic center of it. With each succeeding dance the human sector diminishes a bit more. Although his sensibility will not permit him to remove the human element entirely, Nikolais is slowly but surely pushing it to the background.

Murray Louis, long the leading dancer with the Nikolais company, has now launched his own group; it bears a strong similarity to the parent organization. The dancers, and notably Phyllis Lamhut, all display a deadpan restraint consistent with a style of movement in which various parts of the body appear to act of their own volition without reference to the rest. Thus a hand may circle rapidly across the trunk in a solitary exploration and return as quickly to its normal repose—the motion imparting an unexpected quirkiness to the dancer's bearing. Louis himself has extraordinary muscular control, and is able to send fingers or a foot coursing about without any indication of energy being transmitted from the core of the body to the extremities. As a choreographer he has a special gift for the witty depiction of the plight of the individual in a generally hostile environment, and in *Junk Dances* has created a small masterpiece. Louis is the ur-proletarian trailing such shreds of outdated grandeur as the little finger elaborately crooked while he sips a can of beer. Surrounded by the commercial fallout of his time, he struggles with advertising artifacts and other fragments as well as with his flashily eyelashed and outrageously corseted wife. The victim of social forces beyond comprehension, Louis dons the armor of a wise guy irreverence to muddle through. At the end he achieves a colorful blinking immolation as a junk-and-light-bestrewn Christmas tree surrounded by people hanging empty cartons of consumer goods on his stoical

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

frame. Others of his works capture elements of his against-the-grain stance but none quite as successfully as *Junk Dances.*

At the Billy Rose Theater the second part of the "Festival of Dance 1968-69" brought together Merce Cunningham. Alvin Ailey, José Limon and a trio of advant-gardists. From youngest to oldest none had ever had such a broadly inclusive showcase. For Limon, one of the grand old men of Modern Dance, it came too late. Limon possesses the integrity of his somewhat dated convictions, but his conception of dance as a social action phenomenon finds little response in the contemporary audience. *Moor's Pavane,* based on the Shakesperean story, was the one bright spot of an otherwise dull week which saw the premiere of *Comedy,* a long winded reflection on how women could stop war: a theme borrowed from Aristophanes which Aristophanes handled much more successfully. *Missa Brevis* and *Psalm* dealt with the theme of putting the pieces together after the cataclysm of World War II, but went on far too long and were far too obvious.

Merce Cunningham offered a selection of his works dating from 1953 up to his most recently created piece, *Walkaround Time,* an extravagant conceit in style, manners and movement. It presumes to an amplitude that a major work would naturally require but ends up as a rather tenuous shaggy dog story with diverting incidents. The score of David Behrman, ". . . for nearly an hour . . .", begins with the sound of footsteps and waves, is broken in the middle by a period of canned Latin music designed to keep the spirits up, and concludes with periods of silence interspersed with the babble of voices. Scattered on stage are inflated rectangular plastic forms, with elements of Marcel Duchamp's "The Large Glass" painted on them. The dancers perform solos, duets, trios, and so forth and finally assemble the forms into a semblance of the original Duchamp work. The major failing was the distance between expectation and actuality. The dance itself had beautifully phrased elements of the Cunningham quicksilver style and featured a bizarre but excellent solo by Cunningham in which he changed from one set of outer clothing to another while running frantically in place.

Some of this other works, such as *Place, Winterbranch,* and *Rainforest,* displayed Cunningham in full rapport with his subject. *Rainforest* has a sumptuous and menacing set by Andy Warhol consisting of tethered silver pillow-shaped balloons filled with helium. It creates a menacing ambiance for the dancers, making them look like creatures darting amidst slightly hostile vegetation. The dancers' costumes in shades of tan are slashed full of holes contrasting their fleshly vulnerability with the self-possessed and smooth-surfaced perfection of the shining and softly undulating set. Cunningham is skillful in creating the sense of random encounter that would take place in such a locale, and in charging his dancers with the natural nobility of the physical and instinctive. After many viewings, *Place* holds up as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

one of his major achievements. Cunningham enters for a short solo at the beginning. He appears to be straining to settle in his own mind exactly where he is and whom exactly one would expect to find in such a place, framed as it is with a backdrop of newspapers flattened against street gratings. In a miniature epic of urban loneliness Cunningham encounters the girls dressed in plastic and the alienated young men who inhabit the place and chooses to tend a small light as they ricochet through their lives. At the end he thrashes wildly about in a plastic bag and one wonders whether he wants fervently to escape from it or to be interred in it. *Winterbranch,* a work that has at various times been interpreted as a comment on shipwrecks or on civil rights, retains a chaste integrity of purpose in the face of all of its exegetes. The dance is fundamentally an exercise in perception. Designed with a variable light plot which picks out certain details of the production but not always the same ones, *Winterbranch* conveys a tenacious but groping tentativeness rather like a man trying to sort out parts of an important puzzle without the assurance he has all the pieces. The dancers perform the first half in silence and the second half to La Monte Young's ear rasping score which sounds like the amplified grating of furniture casters. With its variably determined lighting, no two performances I have ever seen have been the same, but the current crop of lighting effects is much more satisfactory than those initially used at the work's premiere in 1964. The first series featured a searchlight blazing into the audience's eyes, which had a certain theater-of-cruelty savor but seriously interfered with audience perception since one tended to concentrate on shielding one's eyes.

A whole line of dance development has emerged from Cunningham's conception of movement having an independent existence apart from its musical accompaniment and three of the most prominent choreographers within this tradition were also invited to give programs of their work. Twyla Tharp, Meredith Monk and Yvonne Rainer each showed the contrasting conclusions they had drawn from Cunningham's initial severing of the line between musical cause and movement effect. Tharp has hewn to the basic concerns of the choreographer in organizing time and spatial concerns but has determined the field and range of activity by imposing upon her pieces a systemic logic. She also has eliminated music entirely, unlike Monk and Rainer who will use snatches of almost any music for specific effects. Monk has taken the option of including in her pieces anything and everything with associational relationships, and depends on a collagist's juxtapositions to draw order from the whole. Rainer has moved through phases in which she has seemed attracted to both Tharp's and Monk's solutions, but has now settled on a mode of expression which depends basically on an attitude of honest if dullish seriousness. She welcomes boredom (and often induces it), as the necessary conse-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

quence to her exploration of the simple tasks of running, jumping or standing still. I always have the feeling that her pieces are far more fun to be in than to watch, for her performers seem to have a palpable sense of the weight of their bodies and gestures. Disappointingly, the assembling of such kinetic joys hardly ever passes beyond what looks like self indulgence. The most recent long work was entitled *Rose Fractions.* Its most notable feature was a pornographic film, only included at the final performance, which seemed to reveal an *épater le bourgeois* insouciance rather than an aesthetic decision.

Monk presented two works entitled *Title: 1* and *Title: 2.* Both shared many of the same elements but the first was successful and the second sheer chaos, an indication of the delicate balance of Monk's choreographic course. "Title: 1" assembled everyday and fantasy elements: among other things, the choreographer, dressed as a courtier of the time of Louis XIV, passed slowly across the back of the stage, then, in a bulbous coverall, took a dip in a tank of water and concluded with a solo song-and-dance *liebestod.* It had a diarist's charm and showed the artist assimilating reveries into a very feminine self-portrait. Monk neglected to do the same with what looked like a civil rights comment she incorporated in *Title: 2;* and all the other elements fell apart in a meaningless conglomerate pile.

Tharp shows a strong predilection for non-proscenium-oriented space; she seeks to achieve a greater intimacy with her audience than the orchestra pit ordinarily permits and also to allow a dance to be seen from a number of points rather than frontally. It is an architectural conception of dance as opposed to the painterly, and she eloquently demonstrated its validity with two works, *Group Activities* and *Generation,* that were performed with the audience seated on stage. Because of Broadway economics these had to be given at the Brooklyn Academy of Music rather than at the Billy Rose. The premiere of Group Activities showed Tharp working with ten dancers whom she arranged in a double quintet on a stage area ruled off into two sets of fifty squares. The pulse of the work developed from slightly different timings given to dancers, so that overlapping movement occurred and developed into a surge that ebbed and flowed. At times the two groups of dancers matched one another in mirror image fashion and at other times one dancer and another diagonally opposite shared the same movement. Such moments occurred with cumulative force. Her dance *Disperse* at the Billy Rose Theater was not seen to best advantage in the proscenium situation. It is based on shortened time and space allowances for each succeeding section so that it runs out of space, time and dance energy at a paradoxically accelerating rate. *After "Suite"* received its first performance and proved to be a languidly sensuous dance with performers retiring from time to time to assume highly decorative mannequin poses. *Excess, Idle, Surplus—a Reconstruction* displayed similar energies to those

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in *After "Suite"* and *Disperse* and on the same program they distracted attention from one another by being too much alike. Since the dances can each stand individually, defter programming would show them off to better advantage. The costuming of all the pieces was handled with rare sensitivity by the artist Robert Huot. If union rules of Scenic Artists Local 829 were not created to keep the likes of Huot out, the world of dance would be a far more attractive place.

The Alvin Ailey Dance Theater completed the Billy Rose segment of the *Festival* with a selection of pieces from repertory including *Revelations,* Ailey's skillful rendering of religious sentiment as expressed through the "spiritual." After a long period of quiescence as a choreographer he premiered *Quintet,* a sweet and sour dance for five girls who move in best Motown pop style and slowly strip off their veneer of hip compliance to reveal a genuine despair. The company looked exceptionally good, surfing genially along just prior to the crest of the beat and imparting an impressive fluidity to everything they did.

The "Festival", at least the first two-thirds of it, was a triumph for the artists and for the Ford Foundation, which had the initiative to pry Modern Dance away from its habitual stamping ground, the university community. Modern Dance has long shied away from the responsibilities entailed by large scale theatrical appearances, but this year it made its commitment and stuck to it. Three major companies had Broadway seasons, avant-gardists appeared professionally north of Fourteenth Street before people other than their friends, and a potential new audience was given easy access to a wide variety of dance experience. Insiders estimate that the hard core Modern Dance audience would fill the house two nights per week. The Ford Foundation made it possible for the others to come, and it will be interesting to see whether they return.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

STEPHEN FARBER

Artists in Love and War

KAREL REISZ's *Isadora* (now absurdly retitled *The Loves of Isadora*) has suffered more than most films for its unconventionality. After an unsuccessful Los Angeles opening last December, Universal, with Reisz's unwilling help, hacked almost fifty minutes out of the film in the hope of making it more "commercial." *Isadora* luckily survives this mutilation, but some valuable material has been lost in the attempt to simplify the film's intricate crisscrossing of different times. Since films *can* be restored, even years later, I don't think it's academic to try to provide some record of the film that Reisz made, rather than the compressed version that Universal has chosen to exhibit.

Ironically, neither the shorter running time nor the frantic advertising campaign that tries to identify Isadora Duncan as the world's first hippie is likely to turn the film into a crowd-pleaser. It remains stubbornly unfashionable, a daring experiment in film biography. *Isadora* opens with a scene in which the twelve-year-old Isadora burns her parents' marriage certificate to seal her commitment to art and beauty, then jumps forward forty years to Isadora dictating her memoirs in her French Riviera villa a few days before her death. The rest of the film intercuts routine and some ominous moments from the last days of Isadora's life with a variety of episodes from the years of her greatest successes. Many film biographies begin in the "present," then review the story of their subject's life in one continuous flashback, but Reisz juxtaposes time past and time present throughout *Isadora,* and often quite arbitrarily: One of the young Isadora's first German concerts follows a scene in which the older Isadora is almost run down by the handsome Bugatti driver who intrigues her. Almost the entire film is a third-person film, not a film of memory, and the transitions from one time to another are not made through Isadora's consciousness. (The one *remembered* sequence in the film—Isadora's reflection on the death of her children—is stylistically differentiated from the other flashbacks.) In fact, the film seems almost perverse as it keeps interrupting the "story" of Isadora Duncan, revolutionary dancer and pioneer of free love, with scenes from a very different "story," about a faded middle-aged woman chasing after a young man, entertaining admirers at a cafe, meeting with her fortuneteller, selling her furniture.

The most obvious effect of this constant intercutting is to undermine audience identification with Isadora; the film refuses to let us be absorbed in the excitement of the young Isadora's life. To make

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

matters worse, within the flashbacks themselves the staples of biographical fiction are almost all missing. Reisz clearly isn't interested, for example, in Hollywood's familiar saga of the star's arduous rise to fame, so he boldly cuts from Isadora's first arrival in Europe and her exhilarated vision of artistic triumph as she confronts the Elgin marbles in the British Museum—she images herself dancing through the Acropolis at dawn—to one of her first successful London recitals. We know she didn't succeed overnight, but we can make the jump from imagination to reality by ourselves. Reisz purposely breaks the film into jagged, non-linear pieces, and omits the transitions that would be obligatory in drama; but that's because he's making a biographical film, not a dramatic one, and he means to leave a certain arbitrariness, a certain casualness, a certain fragmentation in his portrait of Isadora, as a way of acknowledging that life *doesn't* fit the symmetrical frame of a backstage fiction.

In his last film, *Morgan,* Reisz was attacked by many people, even some very intelligent critics, for a strange reason—he did not tell them exactly what to think of his hero. There was a rare tentativeness in the characterization of Morgan that upset and outraged many audiences. Both the people who loved the film and the people who hated it wanted to see Morgan in a very clear and simple way. Young people adored him for his nuttiness and his defiance, and identified with him as a nonconformist hero, but they were quite troubled and confused by the moments in which his charming eccentricity slipped into unmistakable neurosis. Older critics like Stanley Kauffmann and John Simon, on the other hand, despised the film because they too saw it as a celebration, but of a man who seemed to *them* infantile, mindless, paranoid, not heroic. Both groups essentially missed the point. *Morgan* was never intended as a *glorification* of childish anarchy, but only as a sympathetic, detached *examination* of a very peculiar personality. It asked that we respect Morgan's bizarre, immature irreverence as a twisted sign of life, but it never suggested that we should emulate him. The film kept its distance from Morgan, included genuinely disturbing and ugly flashes; in other words, it demanded a great deal from us—that we take Morgan on *his* terms rather than our own.

In *Isadora,* a film with only minor fictionalization, this tentative, open-ended characterization seems even more appropriate, a remarkably successful attempt to "write" interpretative biography for the movies. Reisz clearly has a good deal of sympathy for Isadora, as he did for Morgan, because she is an innovative artist and a woman who refuses a conventional life. But he resists the tendency to idealize her; at many moments in the film she is portrayed as naive, vain, oversolemn, foolishly infatuated with the dandy's sense of Beauty. Reisz even goes so far—too far, I think—as to parody Isadora quite blatantly in the sequence in which she falls in love with her ugly

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pianist for the "smothered flame of genius" she sees in his eyes. It's an interesting idea to try to include parody as one instrument of a rounded, complex characterization, even if it doesn't work here; Reisz clearly wants a wide *range* of responses to Isadora, so that we begin to define an impression of her only gradually, after looking at her from a startling variety of perspectives. Reisz shows us more and more of Isadora, but he never "explains" her with flat psychological or moral labels. We may dislike Isadora or find her maddening at moments, but we can never condescend to her. Nor can we identify with her by absorbing her into the dramas of our own fantasy lives. She remains an intriguing *stranger,* a completely distinctive human being whom we are forced to confront, like Morgan, on *her* terms, stripped of our romantic preconceptions of what a revolutionary artist *should* be. There is in Reisz's films a respect for the quirks of character, for the irregularities of life, that I admire very much.

The tentativeness of the characterization is beautifully enhanced by the film's random, fragmented structure, a non-linear mosaic of impressions of Isadora, without any artificial dramatic momentum that will link one moment to another. Of course there are unifying threads in the film—the scarves that seem to connote freedom but that ironically will cause her death, the foreboding black associated with the Bugatti driver who eludes her until the end of the film. But there is no "story" beyond the gradual deepening of our interest in Isadora. The three love affairs chronicled in the film, with Gordon Craig, Paris Singer, and the Russian poet Esssenin, have no resolutions; we never learn what happened to any of the three men. And even more significantly, there is no easily definable relationship between the young Isadora we see in flashbacks and the older Isadora we follow for the last days of her life. We get no capsule tragic explanation of how Isadora was transformed from a great artist and an advocate of sexual liberation into the lonely, tormented, shrewish, absurd old woman living out her last years on the Riviera. Reisz simply presents this irony for our consideration, and the conclusions we can draw are less decisive than they might be in a dramatic film, but richer and more provocative.

The contrast between the younger and older Isadora works in a very complex way throughout the film. On the one hand, seeing the younger woman in constant juxtaposition to the older one allows us to recognize a limitation in the young Isadora that we might not otherwise notice—we see that this waspish, desperate old woman only travesties, coarsens the qualities of humorless self-indulgence and gauzy romanticism in the revolutionary dancer and lover. At the same time, though, the madness of the older woman gains dignity through the juxtapositions. The film astutely perceives the way in which an iconoclastic figure who has outlived the revolution that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

she began will deliberately exaggerate her own eccentricities, start to *camp,* and parody herself to escape the humiliation of seeing others parody her. The haunted fifty-year-old Isadora is merely trying to keep alive some of the daring and independence that made her so vibrant when she was young, grasping fiercely at what is true and beautiful in her past in a bold effort to defy time. Through all these scenes the range of Vanessa Redgrave's performance is extraordinary, and as the older Isadora she creates one of the harshest and most astonishing characterizations any moviegoer can expect to see.

But the film is a portrait of an age as well as of a remarkable woman—the most telling evocation of the first decades of the century since *Jules and Jim.* Hollywood's biographical extravaganzas depend simply on heavy research and meticulous, expensive sets to create period, and although *Isadora* has carefully-researched details too, it succeeds because it has a coherent, intelligent attitude toward the past and an affection for it. This was a period of boundless enthusiasm for art, when the great innovators believed that the revolution they were fighting against antiquated forms of dance, poetry, painting, design might eventually liberate the entire world. And the film sees Isadora as the priestess of this new age and its ideals. It is her innocence that touches us most—the genuine seriousness and sincerity of her dedication to art, her vision of the artist as solitary heretic, the contradictions in her of brazen sexuality and spiritual yearning, aristocratic *hauteur* and peasant vitality, but above all the sense of *wonder* in her eye for love and beauty.

In the scenes with Gordon Craig particularly—beginning with his black-cloaked figure throwing open the curtain at the rear of an empty auditorium, and ending with the parting of the lovers on a deserted beach, Isadora about to give birth to their illegitimate child, Craig off to design a new production of *Hamlet* in Moscow—the film captures the exuberance of living at one of the greatest moments in the history of art. Art and life seem in perfect harmony, responsive to each other, and almost indistinguishable. The love scenes between Craig and Isadora have just the right mixture of wit and lyricism: In Craig's bohemian apartment, unfurnished except for drawing boards and his own sketches, the lovers sleep contentedly on the bare floor; later Isadora dances naked through the moonlit room as Craig tries to seize the rays of light on his canvas. He and Isadora shut out the world, and draw strength from each other's arrogance, confident of their power over art and life. Craig seeks to "make a world, create a whole universe in the theater," while for Isadora extra-marital affairs and illegitimate children represent a thrilling challenge to convention, an opportunity to apply her revolutionary ardor to a world beyond the theater, and help to free women from the sexual restrictions of the last century. Her politics are vague, though she is excited by the Russian Revolution and goes to Moscow to start a school. But

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

when the American press ask her if she is a Bolshevik, she says, "All artists are revolutionaries . . . I don't think revolutions should *be* political." That naiveté simultaneously charms us and puts us off a little. And I think Reisz's attitude toward Isadora, lightly mocking, sometimes even cutting, but essentially tolerant and affectionate, is illuminating; it testifies to his distance from Isadora's childlike flamboyance, but his envy of her exhilaration.

For during the first years of the century, there *was* a bourgeois world to be shocked, an unmistakable, repressive philistine spirit that could be identified and assaulted. The film makes this clear in one scene especially, Isadora's Dance of Liberation in Boston on her return from Russia, which soon has the audience gasping, hooting, shrieking, and running from the theater. The philistines haven't exactly become extinct, but one of the most frustrating things to contemporary artists must be the impossibility of shocking an audience. When art had so much thrill and volatility associated with it, it is easy to understand the artist's vanity in believing that he could initiate a revolution in morals outside the theater to match the revolution on stage. We can read of enraged responses to Duncan's dancing, or to the first modern art shows, or to the surrealist films of Buñuel and Dali, with astonishment and delight. Today's middlebrow audiences, by contrast, have no trouble absorbing a Kienholz exhibit, a performance of *America Hurrah* or The Living Theatre, Godard's *Weekend* or Cassavetes' *Faces*—works designed to disturb and outrage—with smiles and shrugs. Unconventional artists are supported by foundations, interviewed on the *Today* show, invited to White House teas. The image of the artist as outlaw has practically disappeared. So artists either begin perfecting hermetic little specialty worlds—guilt-ridden Jewish-American suburbia, abstract expressionist psychedelia—that have less and less relationship to the complexity of contemporary experience, or, like Godard, they begin using art as propaganda for the Revolution, and as a last resort, relinquish art altogether to take up their places in the barricades. Each of these choices involves the same hidden desperation and pessimism about the role of art in society. Isadora never doubted that her art—an apolitical art—could itself contribute to the renovation of society; she believed passionately in art's relevance even when it did not have an immediate, observable social effect. This profound change in artistic sensibility is implied indirectly in the film, in the shocking contrast between the young, exuberant, committed Isadora and the older woman who survives as a grisly caricature of her own youthful optimism. She has lived past the moment—the last moment, I think—when art and life seemed perfectly compatible and mutually enriching, and she looks already like a grotesque anachronism, a garishly-painted skeleton of a vanished dream.

One thing that makes *Isadora* refreshing is that it finds some in-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

teresting visual solutions to the notoriously difficult problem of convincing us that its heroine is an artist. There is a fine sequence that intercuts Isadora's seduction by Gordon Craig with one of her most erotic dances on a stage set that he might have designed. As the two begin to make love, there is a startling cut to a striking shot looking down on Isadora from a point high above her, as she writhes in a simulation of sexual ecstasy on a completely bare stage; the sequence continues with more intercutting from several different angles and perspectives, edited together in crescendo rhythm, for perhaps a few seconds too long. This sequence is true to the artist's responsiveness to ordinary experience, and also to her instinctive habit of submitting life to the test of imagination. Isadora is in love with her own sensitivity; she *uses* experience, devours it, appropriates it to a private, narcissistic vision of herself as revolutionary.

This ability to transform experience and abstract it works, in Robert Frost's words, as "a momentary stay against confusion." Isadora describes the death of her children as the moment when all joy went out of her life; yet the images of the children's death that we see, through her memory, are among the most beautiful in the film. In the original version, fleeting images connected with the accident were flashed at us regularly, mysteriously throughout the first half of the film until they were finally explained when Isadora came to write about the episode in her memoirs. Most of these subliminal flashes have been cut, destroying an important secondary rhythm of the film, but there is a very early one that remains and tantalizes us—a shot of the children's faces pressed against the rear window of an automobile as they are driven away from Isadora on their fatal ride. When we see the rest of the images later, they are all filtered through a soft blue-grey light, some in slow motion, completely silent and out of linear order, as if freed from time and frozen—the hearses moving slowly through a cemetery, the children's faces again, trapped behind glass, the final parting in Singer's greenhouse, the car crashing over the bridge into the Seine, then bobbing up and down forlornly in the still water. This sequence is presented as a sort of sad poetic fantasy, almost as if Isadora is *lingering* over it, in memory, to make it beautiful. Even facing inexplicable horror, Isadora has not lost the ability to refashion life, through imagination, into an artistic vision. She deliberately gives the experience a significance that in reality it could not have had—it confirms, for her, the terrible solitude of the life she has chosen, emphasizes the irrevocability of her decision to reject the normal domestic role of wife and mother for her artistic calling. This is not to say that she "wanted" her children's death, but that when they died, she had a way of clarifying and making sense of the experience; the artistic tendency to mold chaos into order does not fail her—she has converted catastrophe into resonant personal tragedy. Reisz makes all of this clear to us by his acute decision

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to stylize this sequence, thus distinguishing it from the film's other flashbacks and providing a sharp insight into the artist's unique gift for survival.

After all this praise, it is only fair to admit that *Isadora's* intentions are more impressive than its achievements. The conceptions in the film are fresh and exciting, but the execution of them is uneven. Most of the episodes with Singer are flat and pointless (and badly played by Jason Robards), the Russian scenes have a hackneyed Slavic lustiness that would seem more appropriate in a musical about gypsies, the Boston sequence is shrill and crudely overdrawn. Reisz's judgment is not as reliable as his superior command of the medium would lead you to believe. In addition, the fragmented structure of the film occasionally gets in the way of a dramatic point that Reisz wants to make. The older Isadora says at one moment, with great emphasis, "Art and love destroy each other"—a thought that recurs in her autobiography—and we expect to see that insight dramatized in the flashbacks. But the rest of the film only cursorily touches on the incompatibility of art and love. Too much of *Isadora* is too weakly suggestive. When Isadora's scarf is caught in the wheel of a car and strangles her to death at the end of the film, it's tempting to try to draw the conclusion that her search for freedom contains an element of self-destructiveness. But it's hard to put that reading to work in the rest of the film. All we can say is that the great moment of Isadora's youth, the dream of art as a revolutionary way of life, could not last; by the late twenties it had already given way to romantic disillusionment, a sense of tragic destiny in the expatriate American artists in Paris. In the film's stark, horrifying final image we can see beyond the death of Isadora herself, to the approaching death of an epoch and its awesome, impossible vision of art.

As a portrait of the artist in a society of the present or near-future, Bergman's new film *Shame* makes a striking contrast to *Isadora.* Most of the reviewers have talked about the film simply as Bergman's statement about war and its dehumanizing effect on the civilians who must endure it, and although the film is masterful in this regard, it is important to consider that the central figure is not Everyman, but an artist—a musician who fled with his wife from Stockholm to a nearby island when the Philharmonic was disbanded four years earlier, at the start of the war. What *Shame* tells us about war is clear and even rather conventional, but as a study of the artist-in-war, the film's implications are much more ambiguous, provoking, and disturbing.

The protagonist, Jan Rosenberg, seems to undergo a crucial change of character during the course of the film. At the beginning he and his wife Eva are living in relative quiet and security in the country, and he is utterly dependent on her. The film opens on him sitting

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in bed, telling her his dream of returning to the orchestra. He does not shave, keeps his pajamas on during the day, cringes at every sound of bombs, tries unsuccessfully to kill a chicken for dinner, and seems able to stay alive and relatively sane only because of Eva's solicitousness about him. But after more and more bombings and invasions, and after their relationship has gradually deteriorated, Jan discovers that Eva has been having an affair with a friend of the family, the mayor Jacobi, and suddenly, threatened with the loss of what he has taken for granted for so long, he finds a new aggressiveness in himself—he hides the money that Jacobi has given Eva and refuses to return it when Jacobi needs it, thus insuring Jacobi's death; and the man who once could not kill a chicken now picks up a gun and, fearfully at first, but with increasing relish and confidence, shoots Jacobi to death. This murder crushes Eva, and in effect reverses the roles that we observed at the beginning of the film—now Eva is drugged, helpless, and dependent, and she trails after Jan, who seems to have discovered her secret of survival. He kills a young soldier for his shoes and his ticket on a boat leaving for the mainland. And when the captain jumps overboard, Jan steers the boat on by pushing aside the sea of corpses that seem to stretch on to infinity and block their way. At the end of the film it is Eva, leaning on Jan in the boat, who recites her desperate dream of the child she will never have.

But beneath this superficially clear reversal, there are some unsettling continuities. Jan's actions are very different in the two sections of the film, but his motivation is remarkably consistent. He *never* looks beyond himself. At first the pressures on him are light, and he can survive very comfortably by trusting to his wife's maternal instinct and allowing her to nurse him, pamper him, protect him. When his wife's loyalty begins to waver, at the same time that the threats from the external world have increased, passivity no longer appears adequate to see him through, and he intuitively recognizes that he must assume a more belligerent stance if he is to keep himself alive. What is astonishing and appalling is that he has only one instinct throughout the film—the instinct for self-preservation. Only his *methods* of achieving his lone objective change.

It could be argued that the never-ending war is responsible for smothering Jan's humanity, and this interpretation is undeniably valid to a certain point. Yet the film very deliberately contrasts Jan's callousness to his wife's instinctive compassion. She is victim to the same horrors that overwhelm him, but her responses are *not* deadened. Even at the beginning Jan refuses to listen to news reports, but sits coddling an incoming wisdom tooth and recalling the pain of his last operation. When a paratrooper falls near thir home, Eva rushes to help him while Jan remains fearfully behind. A little later they are driving away from home after a heavy enemy attack, and they see the ravages of the bombing—bodies thrown everywhere,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

frozen in unnatural poses, a series of studies for a new *Guernica.* When Eva sees the body of a little girl, she stops the car and rushes out to try and help. But it is too late. Her face registers the grief that comes from really *seeing* the effects of war, and the impossibility of coming to terms with the death of children. But Jan sits in the car, huddled and shivering, crying for himself; he cannot perceive the annihilation of *other* lives that so lacerates Eva.

Nor can he create life; Eva is childless because Jan is quite literally sterile. Early in the film there is a very long scene, done in a single take, all shot from behind Jan's shoulder and looking at Eva's face as they have dinner together and she tells him of her strong desire for a child. We do not see Jan's face at any time during this scene, and so Bergman subtly reinforces Jan's isolation from Eva, his unwillingness or inability to pay attention to her and identify with her dreams. I think there is a deliberate echo of this scene late in the film when Eva and Jacobi are in her bedroom and he talks to her about his son and his grandson, and about his mother's death; again we have a very long single take, from behind Eva's shoulder looking at Jacobi's face as he talks. But this shot, unlike the earlier one, *is* interrupted finally, the awful loneliness of two people is, for a moment, bridged: When Jacobi asks, at the end of his story, if she is sorry he has become a burden on her, Bergman cuts to a closeup of Eva's face, pained and responsive to what he has said, as she tries to comfort him. Eva can hear and be touched by the cries of another human being. Jan cannot. The difference between them is as simple and as terrible as that.

Only once does Jan seem responsive to his surroundings—in a small antique shop where he and Eva go to buy a bottle of wine, and where the sounds and images of war can be momentarily forgotten. As a tiny music box plays, and the elegant Meissen figures revolve slowly, the camera rests on Jan's face, and we feel his yearning for this world that has lost its relevance, the world of craft and beauty and cultivation. Outside the store Jan is lost, cut off from the only creative sources of his life. No wonder he lingers inside for as long as he can, contented to dream of a past that he comprehends, oblivious to a future that bewilders him. Eva is not political, as she says, but at least she tries to keep up with the events of the war and continues to respond to its casualties. Jacobi goes even further and tries to become a political leader. But Jan has no way of coming to terms with the convulsions in his society. His attention is fixed on himself, on his viola, on the rare Dvorak trio that Jacobi brings him. As Jacobi exclaims, in the crucial exchange of the film: "The sacred freedom of art, the sacred slackness of art!"

And the film as a whole reflects some of Jacobi's ambivalence about the artist's self-absorption. Jacobi himself realizes too late that his own social consciousness has proved futile and self-defeating. Eva's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

compassion leads eventually to the breaking of her spirit. Her sympathies make her vulnerable, and when she sees her husband kill Jacobi, she is shattered, no longer able to find her way on her own. Without Jan to lead her, she would surely die. And it is just *because of* Jan's blindness to anything outside himself and his art that he remains, in the deepest sense, invulnerable, untouchable, and thus well-prepared to seize at the means of survival when it presents itself. In this sense the film's portrait of the artist is not entirely negative, for after all he does find in himself, in his stubborn self-regard, the strength to endure. But the film's final images of the boat on a still sea, under a still sky, passing through a sea of corpses, make us wonder whether there is anything to stay alive for. Jan has won, but his victory seems hollow; more than that, Bergman's images clearly say that his physical victory is a spiritual defeat. He has no future after all.

Finally, then, in spite of a certain complexity that enriches the film and makes it more challenging, I think we are repelled by the way in which Jan survives. *Shame* would be a more comfortable film if we could blame this growing viciousness in Jan simply on the corrupting power of total war, but Bergman upsets us by insisting that we see that the potential for murder was in Jan all along. The artist of our preconceptions is quiveringly sensitive, and Bergman's artist (as embodied by gaunt, soulful Max von Sydow) seems to fit that picture exactly; it takes us a while to realize that this fastidious, "spiritual" man is remarkably *insensitive* to other people, to any life beyond himself. Jan's self-absorption is a kind of brutality that only awaits the right circumstances to flash out in physical violence. The capacity to destroy lies dormant in the artist's nature, Bergman seems to say; it is only a terrifying extension of the qualities of narcissism and detachment that make him an artist.

Critics have said that *Shame* is something of a new departure for Bergman, because it deals with politics, and at first glance the film does look radically unlike his last two films, *Persona* and *Hour of the Wolf*. But if *Shame* is taken not simply as a vision of contemporary warfare, but as a study of the dilemma of the artist, and his relationship to his society, the three films make a remarkably coherent trilogy. *Persona* too was built around the situation of an artist cut off from her art—in this case an actress who stops one night during a performance of *Electra,* then retreats into complete silence, electing to stop talking as a way to stop "lying." In that film there *is* a startling political scene that leads into *Shame,* and that helps to define the artist's predicament—the actress watching the self-immolation of a Buddhist monk in Vietnam on the television in her hospital room, and cringing in horror. Like Jan, Elisabeth in *Persona* withdraws because her art seems inadequate to deal with the atrocities she sees outside the theater. For most of the rest of the film we observe her relationship with the nurse who has been assigned to take care of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her in the country. And in the tortured scenes between the two of them, Bergman dissects what he sees as a prototypical encounter: Elisabeth begins to embody the parasitic artist, preying mercilessly on Alma for new "material" for her art. The most chilling sequence in the film begins when Alma reads Elisabeth's letter to her psychiatrist; Elisabeth writes of Alma as an amusing "case," and clinically analyzes the passionate revelation—of an orgy with another woman and two boys on a beach—and the intimate guilt feelings that Alma had described to Elisabeth the previous night. Alma is horrified and hurt when she learns of the cold, pitiless way in which Elisabeth is scrutinizing her, and she tries desperately, unsuccessfully to get a more emotional response from her. But Elisabeth will not speak. The only sound she utters is after she steps on the broken glass that Alma has left on the ground, or when Alma threatens her with scalding water. Like Jan in *Shame,* Elisabeth comes momentarily out of her stupor only when she is directly threatened with physical pain. In the terrible, impregnable, self-willed silence that Elisabeth uses to disturb Alma, Bergman has constructed a diabolically effective metaphor for the cruel vigilance and unresponsiveness that are natural to the artist. Once again this is not purely a negative statement about art—for Elisabeth's silence goads Alma into recognizing a good deal about herself that she has tried to conceal—yet the artist remains maddeningly aloof and uncommitted. The artistic vision may be a source of insight, but as a human stance it seems vicious and implacable.

Hour of the Wolf is a much less interesting film than either *Persona* or *Shame* because here Bergman's attitude about the central figure of the artist seems fuzzy and confused. As in the other two films, there are moments when we feel the artist is frighteningly destructive—the scene in which he tries to kill his wife, a fantasy scene in which he drowns a child, perhaps his son, who has interrupted his painting. But at other moments it seems that Bergman shares his main character's self-pity, and his fear of being devoured by a hostile philistine world. *Persona* and *Shame* contain some of the same ambivalence—we feel that it is partly the *world's* fault that these artists have turned destructive; but the two films also show a willingness to confront the harshest possibilities in the artist's nature without apology, without indulgence—a harshness and clarity of vision that are missing from *Hour of the Wolf.*

I think the decisive impression one takes away from *Shame,* especially when it is considered as a conclusion to the preceding two films, is the guilt Bergman seems to feel about his artistic calling, the vehement self-disgust with which he exposes the artist's selfishness and his destructiveness. Bergman's critique of the pettiness that swamps most contemporary art is devastating; the irony is that Bergman's own art is such an extraordinary exception—the very opposite of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sterile, self-contained art that he seems so alarmed by in his films. The richness of Bergman's women, especially—Bibi Andersson's nurse in *Persona,* Liv Ullmann's artists' wives in both *Hour of the Wolf* and *Shame*—belies his guilty, pessimistic vision of the artist in those films. No film-maker who can create a character like Eva in *Shame* with so much warmth and conviction, no one who can guide an actress to the searing performance that Liv Ullmann gives in this film, could possibly share Jan Rosenberg's mean self-absorption. There are three moments in *Shame* when Liv Ullmann cries—once when she realizes that she will never have a child, again after an ugly fight with Jan that crystallizes the erosion of their marriage, and finally when she asks him why he lied to kill Jacobi. In this last scene, as she cries achingly, in horror and incomprehension, the tears torn out of her in violent convulsions, her face fills the entire screen, and Bergman keeps his camera on her for several seconds. Jan's tears are never more than whimpers, for himself, but Eva's tears are for others as well as herself, for the pain of human existence. And in spite of the film's pessimism, in her tears there is a sign of irrepressible humanity, concern and compassion, a sign of *life.* Bergman would probably take small consolation from this artistic achievement, for he admits that the artist can create something beautiful on his canvas, or with his viola, or in front of a camera; his point is that as a human being, in all spheres of life outside his art, the artist is a monster. But imaginative sympathy—whether the cool, intelligent interest Karel Reisz shows in Isadora Duncan, or the passionate, womanly performance Bergman draws from Liv Ullmann in *Shame*—seems to me a special kind of aesthetic triumph; it reveals the artist transcending the limitations of self to create, in the fully-realized figure of *another,* a lasting image of his own engagement with life.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Letters to the Editor

Dear Sir:

To describe the traditional form of drama—of say *Oedipus, Othello, A Doll's House, Desire Under the Elms*—I have proposed the term "linear": the plays move forward in time through a set of expectations toward an answer implicit in a question posed at the beginning. How will the killer of Laius be brought to justice? How will Iago get his revenge? etc. In these plays, what men do determines their fate. Another kind of drama, exemplified by *Waiting for Godot*, deals mainly not with what man does, but what he is; his condition is usually seen as aimless, confused, despairing, and, appropriately, this drama's form tends to be non-linear, often ignoring or inverting temporal progression, suspending or denying sequence, refusing answers to its implied questions. It moves along through juxtaposed incidents that are discrete and often seem incongruous, but that by accumulation reflect the discontinuity of experience. I have called this form contextual ("A Metaphor for Dramatic Form," *Journal of Aesthetic and Art Criticism,* XVII, 2, 1958).

Neither form is pure: all significant linear plays have contextual moments that deal with man's condition—as in soliloquy, in interludes of mood or passion, in externalized fantasy, etc.; and in all contextual plays, even though they may deny time, one speech or action must follow the last one, they must follow each other in time, and inevitably the separate moments are informed by forwardness.

A misreading of my terms, by Bert O. States, appeared in THE HUDSON REVIEW (Spring, 1967). Since they have been found useful in criticism, and will continue to be, the States essay needs correcting. He pleads "The Case for Plot in Modern Drama." He cites me as "the only critic to attempt an outright *aesthetic* examination" of the differences in dramatic form, but then concludes that I have not been discussing "form" at all, but simply "plot"—a word that turns out to have several meanings for him. He accepts first the idea that "plot" should be thought of as, in Aristotle's words, the "soul" of the drama. He takes this to mean it *is* the drama, it is whatever takes place; it is what it is, like Antony's crocodile; so an Ibsen and a Beckett play would be alike in having—or being—plots. This seems at first semantics, "plot" substituted for "play," not relevant to my search for differences in form and not worth debating. But then begins a troublesome series of contradictory elaborations. States endorses the argument that a critic begin looking at a play not as a sequence of "events" but as a sequence of "ordered meanings going toward a conclusion," of "expressions that build up in the reader's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

consciousness a recognizable pattern of human behaviour." This might be an excellent definition of an essay on psychology. It might do for a textbook or a novel. Its concern for what happens in the "consciousness of a *reader*" suggests how very far it is from confronting the experience of drama, so dependent on cumulative arousal by stimuli of sight and sound to the eye and ear. It is also far from what I am concerned with—and from what Aristotle is concerned with.

Let Aristotle be first. To him, drama was a linear form experienced in the theatre—actors performing a sequence of events with sound and motion, to play on the feelings of an audience. The action that was the soul of drama was literally *doing*. Repeatedly Aristotle stipulated this: it was by reason of their acts that men were happy or the reverse. Moreover, their dramatic action should follow a special sequential pattern, events following each other from probability or necessity, building to a complication and a resolution. As a model for playwrights, Aristotle outlined the Iphigenia story, with all its tricky linear devices. His interest in these contrivances is evident in the care with which he describes such indispensables of the well-made play as "reversals" and "recognitions," particularly the latter—e.g., how to arrange the climactic meetings between long-lost dear ones: should they recognize each other by birthmarks, or other personal tokens, or by a sound heard, or a letter, or by reasoning out a strange appearance? The dramatic characters Aristotle defined all belonged in his linear patterns. They were "men" with definitely representational qualities, who, because of mistake, or trait, or divine interference *did* something which forced them along a troubled path of expectation—usually downward—which moved audiences deeply.

This kind of "plot" is modes away from States's "sequence not of events but ordered meanings building up a pattern of human behavior in the reader's mind." As his essay develops, States leaves behind that curiously generic description of printed communication for other definitions—without observing their contradictions. Thus, he borrows a more nearly Aristotelian concept from Susanne Langer on musical movements in which "One can sense a beginning, intent, and consummation, and see in the last stage of one the condition and indeed the rise of another. Rhythm is the setting up of new tensions by the resolution of former ones." Building on this, States now says, "Plot may be thought of as the peculiar *rhythm* of fiction . . . the mode in which rhythm expresses itself in the drama is the plot." This is closer to Aristotle because said in terms of linear movement to climax rather than order of meanings. Then, near the end, States goes back all the way: thus, he uses plot in the old, conventional sense of planned sequence in speaking of writers who avoid it: "The rejection of plot is a good deal like the rejection of ornamental prose staged so ostentatiously by novelists early in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this century." The impasse here is obvious; if plot equalled play (or novel), to reject it would be to reject writing altogether.

Thus, plot has been defended as a sequence of ordered meanings for a reader; as whatever is; as a series of linear rhythms; and, finally, as simple old plot that may be dispensed with.

The essay is an interesting linear adventure in unexamined contradictions, but it simply does not confront the fundamental critical problem which is my concern—that plays (or "plots") like *Oedipus* and *A Doll's House* are obviously not made in the same way as such plays as *Godot* and *Camino Real,* and that the difference is significant and needs exploring. States himself seems finally to realize this, for in a footnote at the very end of the essay that discounts his whole early argument he writes, "I have not tried to account here for the unmistakable difference in form between the 'Old' drama and the 'New' . . . I hardly feel that all modes of plot organization and progression are identical."

Exactly. Whatever the names we use—form, plot, play—there are basic differences in the making. What are they? I have been trying to get at elements in the genre prior to "plot": hence *linear* and *contextual.* All plotted drama (in the Aristotelian sense) is strongly linear; but not all linear drama is strongly plotted. States's misconception of this is evident in his comments on Chekov. Using "plot" in the conventional sense now, he remarks that "Chekov singlehandedly slew the Plot;" he assumes that I agree—that Chekov is anti-linear—and he says that Chekovian plays are one of my primary examples of "new drama"—contextual drama. This is not the case. I specifically wrote that while Chekov used contextual elements, his plays are definitely informed with linearity:

> Contextual drama has taken two general directions. In the first, character is treated as in the traditional form: made to seem "real," with a life direction, but providing a minimum of linear movement. From this central force, the characters are extended in dimension instead of being developed in direction. This form inherits from Chekov's technique of examining many planes of human surface opposed in tension, and suggesting the forces struggling beneath them. There are many moments in Chekov when life is stopped, non-sequential, timeless; when his several characters speak thoughts and feelings that have almost nothing to do with each other, or with a forward action; they speak past each other, dreaming away their own lives, sounding their separate notes. The effect is not of a contrapuntal, horizontal advance, but rather of a series of sad, exquisite harmonics—vertical, time-stopped chords. So skilful is the playwright in suggesting the tension and depth of the moment rather than of sequence that his dramas sometimes leave the impression of being all mood, all lingering present, when in fact they are firmly threaded on a forward line.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Critics other than States have been misled by the Chekovian *mood* into assuming that the plays are without direction. In fact, in all of them, major questions are insistent: Will Lubya deal practically with the matter of the Cherry Orchard in time? Will the sisters go to Moscow? What will happen to . . .? And the subordinate questions also raise their expectations: how will the game, the duel, the love affair, the marriage turn out? All these questions raised by the action are answered. Even the scenes that concentrate on condition rather than action take their place in a forward sweep; and even more important, they are themselves—as all contextual moments in the theatre must be—touched with linearity.

States further misread my allusion, as in the Chekov paragraph, to the contextual pattern as a series of verticals. States assumes that by vertical I mean a "plummet," and observes, "It is hard to make an unfolding drama stick to any concept of vertical axis I can envision." As the above quotation should make clear, I was using—as elsewhere in the essay—an analogy to musical form to suggest, in contrast to linear, forward movement, a series of complex, reverberating moments in depth, setting up tensions with the next moments, but not primarily moving toward them sequentially. Thus Schoenberg (in *Style and Idea*): "the elements of a musical idea are partly incorporated in the horizontal plane as successive sounds, and partly in the vertical plane as simultaneous sounds." Schoenberg, like the contextual dramatists, was trying with atonal verticals to break the conventional linear cycle of tension, consummation, resolution. "Even a slight reminiscence of the former tonal harmony would create false expectations of consequences and continuations."

Nobody could have derived an understanding of the distinctions between my terms—linear, contextual; horizontal, vertical—from States; and I hope anyone who read his essay will do mine the justice of reading it as well. It has been reprinted in *Aesthetic Inquiry* (Dickinson, 1967) and *Perspectives on Drama* (Oxford, 1968).

Meanwhile, since we can agree with States's afterthought that there are "unmistakable differences in form between the 'Old' drama and the 'New' . . . all modes of plot organization are [not] identical . . ." let us go on from there to isolate the differences.

MARVIN ROSENBERG

Berkeley, California

Dear Sir:

What I was trying to do in the plot essay was to work off a mild fit brought on by what seemed to me an irksome trend in drama criticism. I am over it now and it is hard to get re-excited, but at the time there seemed nothing quite so ripe for a little satire as the *TDR*-style critic, cured of all love, doubt, humility, and humor by wide reading in Wittgenstein and games-theory aesthetics, moving

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in on the New dramas with an infinite tolerance for abstraction and a euphoric faith in the power of *terminology* to encompass complex artistic effects. I think I centered my attack on Mr. Rosenberg (who, in fairness, does not really fit this description) simply because his terms were symptomatic of the trend and were being used by a lot of people. And still are. Which suggests that I might be wrong.

They aren't really *his* terms, of course; he simply joined them into an opposition (and they would be useless to him *without* each other), somewhat as the New Critics of two decades earlier had joined a few other terms, bifurcating poetry into such oppositions as pure and impure, simple and ironic, etc. Now no one ever *intends* to bifurcate. "Neither form is pure," says Mr. Rosenberg cautiously; but what happens when you set up an opposition of this kind is that it screens out all other kinds of information: you can never consider a thing (say, a play) on its own terms, or all things of a kind on common terms, but only in terms of your opposition, which soon becomes, despite these preliminary cautions, a Procrustean dichotomy. Given any two things of different size or texture or intention, *one* will naturally fall closer to one of your poles than the other. Thus Mr. Rosenberg can couple four plays as different in form and cultural assumptions as *Oedipus, Othello, A Doll's House,* and *Desire Under the Elms* under his rubric of traditional-linear on the grounds that what their heroes "do determines their fate"—as if the "acts" performed by Oedipus, Othello, Nora, and Eben Cabot were not as different *from each other* as the so-called "inaction" of Didi and Gogo is from any of them. It is the ease and complacency with which terms like this harden into *facts* that I find so disquieting. Rosenberg begins by proposing his terms somewhat tentatively, but before long he is speaking of "contextual dramatists" as if they held annual conventions. Well, he is entitled to verbal conveniences of this sort. But I have received too many papers from students in which the terms *contextual* and *linear* are no longer verbal conveniences but are bandied about as if they referred to things as palpable as German Expressionism or The Old Price Riots. I can't hold Rosenberg responsible for what *my* students write; he certainly didn't *intend* his terms to be used in this way, but the assurance and neatness with which he puts them forth—the absence of worry and doubt in his essay—encourages the habit. Let me illustrate what happens when *other critics* endorse them. Here is an excerpt from what is probably the most widely-read essay on Chekhov (judging by the number of times I see it in anthologies). Again, Mr. Rosenberg isn't responsible, *technically,* for this vertiginous double-talk (Robert Corrigan is), but his terms deserve the paragraph because it milks them of precisely the kind of energy they contain. Here contextualism gets hoist—and beautifully—on its own petard:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> Chekhov believed that the drama as he knew it could never express the "is-ness" of experience because it was under the destructive tyranny of a sequential and chronological structure. So in its place he invented a form which might be called, to use the terminology of the new criticism of poetry, a contextual or concentric action. (It is hardly fitting to use the word plot here, for, because of its usual connotations, it can only be misleading.) The structure of a Chekhovian play is epiphanic; its purpose is to reveal—literally, "to show forth"—the inner lives of his characters. In such a drama the plot has been twisted into a situation that is to reveal the psychic lives of the characters. There are many dramatic situations in a plot; here a single situation has been stretched to take the place of the plot. This inflation of the situation into the source of the dramatic acion so that it replaces the plot is the vital secret of Chekhovian dramaturgy. To capture "the aimless, unclimactic multiplicity" of his characters' lives, Chekhov has created a form based on what Marvin Rosenberg has called "the tensions of context, rather than direction, of vertical depth, rather than horizontal movement." Chekhov takes a situation and then develops it concentrically, like a series of inscribed but tangential circles.

Erasing from mind a vision of gentle Chekhov at his desk, imagination aspiral, stretching, inflating, and twisting this situation about (on circular paper, perhaps), harassing the well-made play to death like a swarm of giddy bees, I recall a passage from Mr. Richards' *Principles of Literary Criticism,* written in 1925:

> Even among those who have escaped from this delusion and are well aware that we continually talk as though things possess qualities, when what we ought to say is that they cause effects in us of one kind or another, the fallacy of "projecting" the effect and making it a quality of its cause tends to recur. When it does so it gives a peculiar obliquity to thought and although few competent persons are nowadays so deluded as actually to hold the mystical view that there is a quality Beauty which inheres or attaches to external objects, yet throughout all the discussion of works of art the drag exercised by language towards this view can be felt . . . ; . . . the fact that [the critic] is all the while talking about mental happenings becomes concealed. The verbal apparatus comes between us and the things with which we are really dealing.

What are the "qualities"—the hard technical features—which give us leave to call the New drama "contextual" and the old drama "linear"? Well, we never find out, because Rosenberg (like Corrigan) is discussing mental happenings as if they constituted the form itself. There is, for instance, no suggestion in his essay of the difference between *principles* (such as rhythm, development, harmony, balance, repetition, contrast, etc.) and *conventions* (the cultural disguises,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

so to speak, which these principles wear). He tells us that the contextual drama, in order to create the sense of aimlessness and despair, tends to be aimless itself, "non-linear, often ignoring or inverting temporal progression, suspending or denying sequence, refusing answers to its implied questions." I don't really see why we can't pose a question for *Godot,* just as we do for *Oedipus* and *Othello*; why it could not, taken on its own ground (or any other, for that matter), be thought of as moving "forward in time through a set of expectations toward an answer implicit in a question posed at the beginning." A different *kind* of question, of course, but a question even so. The characters certainly ask enough times whether Godot is going to come and in the end the audience gets a pretty flat answer: "Not today, but maybe tomorrow." *The play* hasn't refused to answer its question: it has said, as thoroughly as is necessary, that *life itself* refuses to answer the question to man's satisfaction, and the failure to see a distinction in these two kinds of statements is what give the Rosenberg essay that "peculiar obliquity" of thought Richards refers to.

Well, it is senseless to go on; we are obviously talking at cross-purposes and the solution to the problem is that Mr. Rosenberg and I simply should not make plans to collaborate on the great Poetics of modern drama. I would like to clear up two slight matters though. I am accused of adding that very long footnote at the end of my essay as an "afterthought," thereby shoveling the serious problems of form into the cellar. I resent that a bit, having spent too much of the last few years (with very little to report to the anxious world) sitting and looking out the window and wondering what in God's name form *is* anyway; and that footnote was offered by way of suggesting that the road to an understanding of formal differences in plays is a much harder one than the smooth superhighway Rosenberg has built between Thebes and the City of Despair.

One more thing I *must* get straight is his opinion of my opinion of Chekhov. I don't see how anyone, especially a practicing Contextualist, could possibly have read my remark about Chekhov singlehandedly slaying the Plot as anything but ironic. But Rosenberg *did,* and as a consequence he accuses me of having been misled into assuming that Chekhov's plays are without "direction," and my notion of plot contradictory. One of the few things I have done on the modern drama just happens to be an essay on Chekhov's plots which will correct this gross error and Mr. Rosenberg might do me the honor of reading it. Anyway, there isn't a man in the world whose directions I admire more than Chekhov's and I wouldn't want him thinking, even in the grave, that I had called him anti-linear.

BERT O. STATES

Ithaca, N.Y.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dear Sir:

It may seem ungrateful to quarrel with a review as complimentary as Guy Davenport's review of *George Seferis: Collected Poems, 1924-1955,* [THE HUDSON REVIEW, Autumn, 1968] but since the compliment emerges only after a rather casual treatment of the poet and his tradition, one can't help wondering how much it is really worth. Mr. Davenport begins by implying that the translators, in their introduction to the book, justly place Seferis among such "scholarly" predecessors as Solomos, Kalvos, Palamas, Sikelianos, and Cavafy, but that they unjustly exclude Prevelakis, Elytis, and Kazantzakis from their list of distinguished Greek poets because the translators presumably consider these three Cretans "too countrified." Solomos scholarly? Anyone reading him in the original will acknowledge that his best work is so much the product of the folk tradition inherited from his uneducated mother, so simple in diction and metaphor (if subtle in emotion), as to seem thin and naive in any language other than the "countrified" demotic that the poet learned out of school and had to spell phonetically the whole of his life. Sikelianos scholarly? This poet who was bardic to a fault, who loved nothing so well as writing of country matters, and who wore what little scholarship there was in him under cover of a rich, folk-colored rhetoric? On the other hand, to call Pandelis Prevelakis a distinguished poet, countrified or otherwise, is to raise a serious question of taste: critic yes, novelist of consequence certainly, but hardly a poet to be listed with the others mentioned here, whether your tradition be that of Hellas, Roumeli, Apollo, Demeter, or what have you. And what business does Elytis have in Mr. Davenport's list of excluded, rural, unscholarly Cretans (though in fact not so rural and unscholarly as to be excluded from *Six Poets of Modern Greece,* selected by these same translators)? Born in Crete, yes, but one wonders if Elytis—almost as devoted to Athenian cafés as his friend Nikos Gatsos—remembers the last time he was there, or for that matter, the last time he was in the country (unless the more cosmopolitan islands count as country). There is in any case little about his poetry that links it with the work of Prevelakis or Kazantzakis, certainly little that could be called "countrified" even jokingly, though one does encounter in it much sophisticated celebration of landscape and sea, and in his late work, much scholarly allusion (for example, in *Axion Esti*). Where does this debate over who belongs where leave Seferis? Like any good poet, hopefully beyond the reach of such questionable oversimplifications as those suggested by the epithets "scholarly," "Cretan," and "countrified"—questionable, at least, when the epithets depend so heavily on a kind of guilt by association that in turn depends on a limited understanding of who the associates really are.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mr. Davenport's second pejorative implication is that Seferis may not be as good as he seems to be, that he "may be deceptively accessible because of the echoes in his poetry of French and English influences," and that this hypothetical deception gains strength from his translators, who actually render him "as if he were Mallarmé" instead of allowing him simply to sound like Mallarmé. In support of this implication, Mr. Davenport cites the translation of *"bythismenoi mesa se katakhnies apo t'aspila phtera ton kyknon pou mas plegonan"* (from *Mythistorema,* 1), which Keeley and Sherrard render as "plunged into mists by the spotless wings of swans that wounded us" and which Mr. Davenport renders as "driven into mists by the immaculate beating wings of swans." The Keeley-Sherrard version, whatever else it may be, is quite literal in this instance, as anyone with a precise knowledge of modern Greek will verify. Mr. Davenport offers a version that is inaccurate, whatever else it may be: "*bythismenoi*" does not mean "driven," but "submerged" or "sunken" or "plunged"; the word "beating" nowhere appears in the Greek text; and Mr. Davenport ignores the phrase *"pou mas plegonan,"* which means exactly what Keeley and Sherrard say it means: "that wounded us" (or are Mr. Davenport's "beating wings" supposed to serve for these wounds?) Mallarmé or otherwise, the reviewer's evidence calls for seeing ghosts that either aren't there or appear too distorted to be recognized; and after such manipulation, what authority remains for a true judgment of the poet and his influences?

The review, for all its generosity, strikes this admittedly partial reader as testimony which supports the reviewer's admonition that we be "wary of assessing single poets from a culture as deep and unknown as modern Greece." At least in his implicit assessment of Seferis, Mr. Davenport was not, it would seem, quite wary enough.

EDMUND KEELEY

Princeton, New Jersey

Dear Sir:

I am indebted to Mr. Keeley for his remarks and offer my apologies to any other reader who mistook my perceptions for an essentially negative response to Mr. Keeley's and Mr. Sherrard's translation of Seferis. It is an admirable translation.

GUY DAVENPORT

Lexington, Kentucky

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dear Sir:

Marvin Mudrick, if he can be judged by his book review in the Winter Issue, has only the aim of being a great gust of fresh wind. In his hurry to puff up the work of de Sade, he has performed like a tornado, another of nature's freaks, and ripped from the landscape weeds and good trees alike. One may estimate how far his method takes us toward true judgement by exploring his brusque dismissal of Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano.*

"Poor Lowry," as Mudrick affects to call him, "if he can be judged by his books, had only the aim of being a great writer." If we read the books, we find that the Consul in *Volcano* is not writing a work of fiction—assuming that is Mudrick's context—but making a rather pathetic attempt at producing a history of alchemy, that Hugh, his half-brother, is a journalist who in his youth had tried to write popular songs, and that Sigborn Wilderness, the novelist of *Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid,* returns to the setting of his first book and discovers how faulty his "true" version of its reality turns out to be. Mudrick's picture of Lowry as a simple soul, seeking "greatness" as a moth does a flame, might stand had Lowry not chosen that theme himself. But Mudrick refuses to admit this. He lays on Lowry's grave the silly, if adulatory remarks of the man who helped edit (with Lowry's widow) the manuscript of the unfinished *Dark as the Grave* ("he is a Dante or a Virgil on his way down into the Inferno"). Must we blame Lowry?

Like the old Leech-gatherer, Mudrick perseveres and finds where he might a collection of purple passages from *Volcano* and *Dark as the Grave.* The Mudrick Method applied to "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" might produce this: a sailor, something of a religious fanatic, returns from a rough sea voyage and feels compelled to talk about his experiences, saying such things as "He prayeth well who loveth well. . . ." In his haste to yield to de Sade's pathetic phallacy, Mudrick emasculates the fable of the Consul, former mariner, whose passion for self-destruction is reenacted on the Day of the Dead, and he neglects entirely the plot of the second book under review. He concocts a dishonest critique of Lowry's work, listing as much to port as Douglass Day's does to starboard. But as the popular song goes:

> Blow, blow, thou winter wind,
> . . .
> Thy tooth is not so keen,
> Because thou art not seen,
> Although thy breath be rude.

ALAN CHEUSE

New Brunswick, New Jersey

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Reviews

J. MITCHELL MORSE

Brand Names and Others

THOSE WHO FOLLOW FASHION—stepping along behind the drum majors and majorettes of advertising—march with many different banners, but all their parades move toward the marketplace. Fashion is salesmanship. The desire to be fashionable is the desire to have what others have, do what others do, be what others are. The sales media, offering themselves to advertisers, announce with various degrees of delicacy that they cater to this desire. *Cosmopolitan* says its readers buy what's in because they have good taste, *Esquire* says its readers buy what's in because they are sophisticated, *Seventeen* says its readers buy what's in because they are impressionable, *Glamour* says its readers buy what's in because, having grown up, they can now do what's in, those break-away girls, and the MacFadden chain of confession magazines has boasted in at least one full-page ad that its readers go for brand names and pay more than their better-educated sisters, because, being mostly working-class wives, they lack self-confidence. Race-relations note: the day after I wrote that last sentence, *Ebony* announced that its readers, whose median family income is $7,000, "are more impressed by quality brands than quick bargains" because they know how to live.

All these motives, which are in essence one, are catered to almost as naively by what in our quaint Briticism we call the book trade. The book business. The business of producing, advertising and selling books. In that it is a business it is to some extent like any other business; but in that it has to do with books it is to some extent unlike any other business. I remember when Macy's moved its book department from the first floor to the fifth; when I asked why, I was told that it didn't bring in enough money per cubic foot of space to pay its way on the first floor. A producer going into business primarily to make money would do better in bottle caps or hair curlers. People who go into any aspect of the book business are almost all, however slightly, motivated by another motive as well: they like to be around books. Thus, confounding the two motives, they are ceaselessly tempted to believe that a good seller is a good book, to be impressed by a favorable review in *The New York Times,* and in the case of publishers to judge the quality of a manuscript at least partly by its estimated sales potential. They and the readers to whom they cater are roughly analogous to the horse lovers in Veblen's chapter on pecuniary canons of taste, "whose sense

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of beauty is held in abeyance by the moral constraint of the horse fancier's award." I know there are editors and even sales managers who will freely admit that this or that best seller on their list is a piece of trash, but such private judgments are not reflected in the professional judgments they back with the stockholders' money. And even so, even so, even so, the business office of a good publisher is sometimes affected by values that other businesses know nothing of, and a good book that nobody expects to have a large audience is backed with money because it is a good book. Not with a great deal of money, to be sure; but still, backed with money—printed, bound, advertised and distributed.

I say this out of respect for Louis Zukofsky and his new publishers, Grossman and Jonathan Cape.[1] We respect Zukofsky for his honesty more than for anything else. He isn't a very skillful writer or even a very careful one, but in everything he does we have the sense of a man trying in all simplicity to express the nuances of a subtle understanding. His technique is sufficient only to let the intention be perceived, not to fulfill it; he seems never to have realized that subtlety cannot be expressed without subtlety.

The new volume *Ferdinand* comprises in its ninety-four pages, along with a bibliography and a biographical note, two stories—"Ferdinand" and "It Was"—from the earlier volume *It Was* (Tokyo, 1961), which included in addition two other stories, "A Keystone Comedy" and "Thanks to the Dictionary." The two that are now reprinted are unmistakably better than the two that are not; they represent Zukofsky at his best as a writer of fiction; but they are distressingly flimsy in the details of construction, like summer houses personally hand-made by an architect who is a good architect but not a good carpenter. Here are a few weak joints spotted at random among many others. "Hard knocks in the past seemed responsible for many of his violent resentments and unexplained recurrent breaches short of sportsmanship." Why the "short"? Can Zukofsky have been unable to make up his mind between "breaches of sportsmanship" and "fallings short of sportsmanship"? Or was he playing one of his coy etymological games and expecting us to read "breaches" as "breakings"? Or didn't he know what he was saying? We can't dismiss this last possibility, for the very next sentence reads, "He was yawning excessively when he stepped into bed." "Got," yes; "sank," yes; "fell," possibly; "stepped," absolutely no. Ferdinand sees some Indians in Arizona who subsist by making "clay pots and baskets," meaning "baskets and clay pots." An Indian woman seems to him to exist like a hidden petal of a vine in the grass: "Though, with respect to her, the sky, whose blue resembled the petals that are seen and glared over the empty road in the sun, might be hidden instead of her." Reading this sentence the way we naturally read English, we read "the petals that are seen and glared"

1 FERDINAND, by *Louis Zukofsky*. Grossman Publishers. Cape Editions. Paperback. $1.50.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and wonder what it means. Then we stop and reread and get "resembled the [visible] petals and glared." That's better, but the sentence still doesn't make sense: "Though, with respect to her, the sky might be hidden instead of her." God damn it, Zukofsky, what the hell are you trying to say? On almost every page we have to do the writer's work for him:

> Ferdinand's thought drifted back to the embassy. He wondered if the youngster who had replaced him there had made good, if anyone still could make good in a bankrupt country.
>
> All his family, father, uncles, distant cousins on both sides had been either farmers or gardeners, he heard the man say to his uncle.

After the "he" and the "him" in the first paragraph, we naturally assume that the "his" in the second refers to Ferdinand, and discover once again that Zukofsky has unintentionally misled us. And what bankrupt country?

But his rickety prose is worth repairing as we go along, which is more than can be said for most rickety prose—that is to say, for most of the prose now being written. "Ferdinand" is the story of a French foreign minister's son who, as a little boy whose parents had no time for him, had fallen deeply and permanently in love with the little daughter of a kindly Italian gardener who was like a father to him; since the gardener hoped to marry his daughter to an independent vineyardist, the boy dreamed of becoming one; of course he didn't, but went away to a lycée and the University of Paris and began to have casual mistresses and became an attaché of the embassy in Washington; several years later, still unmarried, still romantically wishing he could be a vineyardist, etc., he resigned because France had been taken by the Nazis, started driving across the United States on a vacation with his exiled aunt and uncle, and deliberately smashed up the car and killed them all, re-enacting a childhood accident with a toy car. The End. Thus robbed of detail, the plot seems as corny as that of any nineteenth-century opera or twentieth-century movie. The car is an all too obvious symbol of his parents' way of life and the values they thought he shared; the aunt and uncle, who in fact had brought him up away from home, are all too obvious substitutes for his parents. And nevertheless the story is lyrical and true. It is a good story in spite of almost everything.

"It Was" is even more improbably true. It deals with a writer's long effort, conscious and unconscious, to write a perfect simple sentence that will put the only possible words in the only possible order; suddenly the sentence comes to him, and Zukofsky ends the story with it. Since the story is only four pages long, it should have been and doubtless was intended to be a little miracle of enclosure, a work of art whose subject is itself; but Zukofsky's prose, though better here than in "Ferdinand," is far from miraculous: his narrator's sentence, for exam-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ple, in the absence of its imaginary context is not impressive. And even so, this story comes through, as most of Zukofsky's poetry comes through, largely on the strength of its good intentions. Our abjectly commercial writers, however skillful at their business, don't have good intentions. That was a difficulty Aristotle didn't have to consider when he said the intention was nothing and the performance all.

And speaking of commercial abjection, the congregation will please rise and sing All Hail the Power of Portnoy's Name.[2] As I write he is for the time being Lord of all, the hottest brand name in the market. By now everybody knows enough about him, and I don't find him worth discussing at length. Philip Roth belongs in the same abject bag as Leo Rosten, Harry Golden, Myron Cohen and Sam Levenson: like Leslie Fiedler's Montana ranch hand who on Saturdays gets all dressed up in a cowboy suit and walks the streets of Butte or Missoula as "the pimp of his particularity," a professional Jew-boy gets his kicks from catering to condescension.

In order to sell a particularity, we must simplify it, idealize it, and make it conform to popular preconceptions. This involves reducing it to a set of easy formulas that don't allow for any personal uniqueness. Though the conventions are different, *Portnoy's Complaint* is as conventional as the fiction in *Woman's Day*, where all adolescent daughters have braces on their teeth and all pre-adolescent sons have freckles. Portnoy is the ideal character toward whom a type of contemporary American novel has been working: The Neurotic Jewish Liberal Intellectual who is *nothing but* The Neurotic Jewish Liberal Intellectual. His mother is The Jewish Mother, Contemporary Comic Variety, whose life is limited to the kitchen and the bathroom. His father is The Jewish Lower-Middle-Class Father, Contemporary Comic Variety—constipation, flat feet and all. Alex Portnoy himself is nothing but a collection of contemporary clichés. He makes all A's in school. He is not athletic. He has all kinds of sexual difficulties because of his mother's smothering love. On his first try with a prostitute he is for aesthetic reasons impotent—just like Holden Caulfield. His mistresses are the standard goyische assortment: The Nice Middle-Western Corn-Fed Idealist, The Whorish Underwear Model, and The Liberal Connecticut Aristocrat. These people move in a swirl of contemporary clichés about Jews in general: Jews Have A Strong Family Life. Jewish Family Life Is Hell. Jews Are Either Extraordinarily Intelligent Or Extraordinarily Stupid And Gross. Some Intelligent Jews Are Also Gross. Some Stupid Jews Have An Innate Refinement—If Only They Could Have Gone To College. Jews Are Not Athletic. Jews are Musical. Jews Are Sad. Jews Get Drafted Into The Army And Die In Battle Just Like Everybody Else. Jews Are Not All Communists. Jews Are Not All Rich. There Are Reactionary Jews. Jews Are Not Acquisitive. Jews Are Extraordinarily Generous. Jews Are Extraordinarily Kind.

[2] PORTNOY'S COMPLAINT, by *Philip Roth*. Random House. $6.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jews Understand. Jews are Nervous. Jews Are Neurotic. Jews Are Sensual. Jews Are Over-Sexed. Jews Are Over-Sensitive.

Since the defeat of the Nazis, the clichés of anti-Semitism among intellectuals have been largely replaced by these more benign ones. They are not equally harmful, but they are equally stupid, and they make me as a Jew almost as uncomfortable. Moreover, as is well known, group stereotypes tend to have a compulsive force: people tend to do what is expected of them, to play the role assigned to them; and if the role is undignified, the effort of rejecting it also conduces to a self-consciousness that would otherwise be unnecessary. Any attribution whatever of group characteristics, to any group whatever, threatens the individuality of members of the group, and to that extent is a form of hostility to them as individuals, however benign and friendly the attributors may feel. No man should have to keep fighting off clichés about himself. Or ignoring them either. As my son recently told an acquaintance, who was surprised that he wasn't interested in playing the stock market, "You've got your stereotypes confused. Jews steal watermelons and have natural rhythm." Philip Roth has the disease of masochistic conformity. He is a servile entertainer. *Portnoy's Complaint* is supinely acquiescent in every way: a series of burlesk skits. Many years ago I went to Boston to cover the trial of *Forever Amber,* and my background research took me to the Old Howard Burlesk Theater. There—five minutes from the courthouse—I heard a droopy-pants comedian singing "The Shithouse Blues" and saying aside to the audience between stanzas, "I'm Jewish." In my mind's eye now he seems to have the face of Philip Roth.

Writers like Isaac Bashevis Singer and Sholom Aleichem are another matter entirely. Human dignity doesn't preclude our laughing at ourselves—quite the contrary, it is precluded by the ways of life that never laugh or smile except at the expense of others. *The Adventures of Menahem-Mendl* is a very funny epistolary novel made up of letters between a schlemiel and his wife.[3] Who among us isn't a schlemiel now and then? Originally the letters appeared in various Yiddish newspapers and magazines over a period of eighteen years, beginning in 1892. In 1909 Sholom Aleichem selected, shortened, sharpened and arranged those he considered the best, and the resulting book has now been translated into English by his granddaughter, Tamara Kahana. Her witty command of English is equal to her piety. You don't have to be Jewish to enjoy Menahem-Mendl and his devoted Sheineh-Sheindl. All you have to be is human. Sholom Aleichem has often been compared to Mark Twain, but I think a better comparison would be to Sterne. I found *The Adventures of Menahem-Mendl* as delightful as *Tristram Shandy.* (Observe students, how I avoided the cliché "He transcends his particularity." It wasn't easy.)

[3] THE ADVENTURES OF MENAHEM-MENDL, by *Sholom Aleichem.* Putnam. $5.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

José María Gironella's *Peace After War* is not about Jews, but it does have a Jewish character whom I'd like to dispose of briefly before going on to more interesting books: Father Forteza, S.J.[4] In view of the extremely small number of Jewish Jesuits in the population (see Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* p. 102), they seem to be disproportionately numerous in fiction. I think of Naphta in *The Magic Mountain,* whose name suggests a wrestler or a washing powder or one of the ingredients of Hell-fire, depending on one's cultural heritage and one's sensitivity to spelling; of Father Rothschild in *Vile Bodies,* whose name suggests money and George Arliss; and of Gabriel de Rennepont in *The Wandering Jew,* whose name suggests a good angel, a bad novel, and a bridge for reindeer. Bertie Stanhope in *Barchester Towers*—who was an Anglican first and last, but who in an aberrant interval became an acolyte of the Jesuits because he happened to be in Rome and then went with a group of them to Palestine to convert the Jews and was converted to Judaism—is doubtless a doubtful case, but he does illustrate a tendency of some writers to equate Jesuits morally with Jews. John Donne, in *Ignatius His Conclave,* calls Hell the chief synagogue, and the founder of the Society of Jesus its chief priest. John Jay Chapman in his xenophobic old age sums up all undesirable immigrants as "the Jesuit and the Jew." Even Joyce, who doesn't make the cheap equation, has characters who do. In *Ulysses* Buck Mulligan sneers at Stephen Dedalus: "O you inquisitional drunken jew jesuit!" And in *Finnegans Wake* the good Shaun lists among his bad brother Shem's indecencies the fact that he "went into the society of jewses." Father Forteza is not in this tradition; for, being a Jesuit in an authoritarian society that the author approves of, he is portrayed as a "good" Jew. At the same time, in case there are any Spaniards who distrust Jesuits . . . though of course not *all* Jesuits are Jews. Thus Gironella eats the insipid cake of servility and has it too. *Peace After War* is in the tradition of didactic novels whose characters make long dull speeches at each other by way of conversation, frequently in indirect discourse. It is set in Spain after the civil war, and its protagonists all welcome fascism, though with various degrees of warmth. Their differences are matters of nuance and timbre; all their heavy lame-brain discussions lead to the conclusion that clerico-fascist control is not only tolerable but desirable. Gironella is an official Great Writer in Spain, as Sholokhov is in Russia; the difference is that Sholokhov's novels, having more horses, make better material for the silver screen.

As I write, Spring is galloping like Isadora all over our suburban acre-and-a-quarter, and in her footsteps spring such flowers as sweet Elysium, Coryza, Epicanthus, Conundrum, Condominium, Vitalis, Lacuna, Hiatus, Cassandra, purple Persiflage, flowering Nexus, perennial Petula, broad-leaved Platypus, climbing Parallax, trailing Neb-

[4] PEACE AFTER WAR, by *José María Gironella.* Alfred A. Knopf. $10.00.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ula, creeping Abscissa, early-blooming Spinoza, Menander, Medusa and Lampedusa, and as I look out at these and at our little kitchen garden full of Colander, Spatula, Pyrex and Silex, how can I sneer at the suburban life? All this, and only 35 minutes from Wanamaker's and the Philadelphia Museum? We have the best of both worlds. Why should I sneer? What's eating all the writers who do, including those who admit that they like the suburban life?

Nothing is eating them, I gather, so much as a desire to sell more copies of their books; in the middle ages any writer could attack the ignorance and corruption of the lesser clergy with impunity and be widely appreciated, as long as he didn't question the dogmas; and in our time such harmless trap-shooting is something the customers expect and want to see. Meeting their expectations is a sure way to make them happy. One day last December the public address system in our suburban Woolworth's was out of order, and a clerk sadly told my wife, "It's hard, not havin' no music at Christmas time." She *wanted* to hear "Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer," "I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus" and "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas" all day long. The book business caters to customers who have a similar habituation to certain accustomed features in the novels they read, and one of the most accustomed is an attitude that celebrates without endorsing, and mocks without threatening, the pleasant things that money can buy and the life that includes such things: in the absence of any need for pleasures of a purely literary kind, uncritical readers are impressed by books that confirm them again and yet again in their decent belief, of whose objective rightness they cannot be too often reassured, that money isn't everything. The Blintza Restaurant in Philadelphia, whose cabbage soup and friendly atmosphere we enjoy, has printed on the backs of its business cards the following incontrovertible truth: "MONEY CAN BUY a Bed but not Sleep, Books but not Brains, Food but not Appetite, Finery but not Beauty, a House but not a Home, Medicine but not Health, Luxuries but not Culture, Amusement but not Happiness, Boon Companions but not Friends, Flattery but not Respect." Novelists who have nothing less obvious to say may very well peddle such sure-fire wisdom; but serious novelists, who offer something more serious or at least funnier, should never put it in except for fun. The message of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is that Slavery Is Wrong, and the message of *1984* is that Dictatorship Is Evil; but what is the message of *Hamlet*? That you shouldn't kill your uncle? That He Who Hesitates Is Lost? And what is the message of *Ulysses*? Say Yes To Life? The great works are not so easily summed up. I say this now because I have before me three good novels whose authors have succumbed to the temptation to be incontrovertible.[5] *Bullet Park, Expensive People*

[5] BULLET PARK, by *John Cheever*. Alfred A. Knopf. $5.95. EXPENSIVE PEOPLE, by *Joyce Carol Oates*. Vanguard Press. $5.95. MR. BRIDGE, by *Evan S. Connell, Jr.* Alfred A. Knopf. $5.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and *Mr. Bridge* are not about suburban life but about the inner lives of certain people who happen to live in suburbs; nevertheless their authors go through the familiar routines of inferior novelists, as if they were no better.

"Well I suppose there's plenty to be sad about if you look around, but it makes me sore to have people always chopping at the suburbs. I've never understood why," says Eliot Nailles of *Bullet Park;* and then in the ensuing two paragraphs he unwittingly damns everything he consciously believes in. The giveaway here lies in the insensitivity of his first sentence, "Well I suppose there's plenty to be sad about if you look around"; earlier, trying to cope for the first time in his life with a seemingly senseless misfortune whose Oedipal cause he could not see, Nailles had thought, "Grief was for the others; sorrow and pain were for the others; some terrible mistake had been made." This is good writing about a serious subject, the changes that take place in the consciousness of a cheerful insensitive man under tests for which his thoughtless life has not prepared him; but Cheever himself as omniscient author mixes it up with a lot of quite ordinary chopping at the suburbs. Some of his sentences also are as rickety as some of Zukofsky's; he doesn't seem to know the uses of the suffix -ity: he speaks of "obsceneness," "obeseness" and "chasteness," for example; and his vocabulary is frequently inaccurate, as when he speaks of the "sameness" of the names Hammer and Nailles. Cheever has always been an uneven writer, and he doesn't progress; in his hands, as in so many others, the English language shows signs of deterioration. Nevertheless, *Bullet Park* is worth reading for its serious intent and its frequent intervals of good execution. The best is the characterization of Paul Hammer, a homicidal maniac, entirely through his literary style.

Joyce Carol Oates does progress. *Expensive People* is the best of her books to date, and within it—shall I say like ontogeny recapitulating phylogeny?—she gets better as she proceeds. This is the story—cluttered up with parodies that don't work and a lot of easy inessential clichés and cliché set-pieces about the foolishness of suburban living and occasional explicit statements about how good it is anyhow—the story, I was saying, of an intelligent and sensitive boy's unrequited love for his cold beautiful mother, his conscious jealousy of and grudging sympathy for his crude father, and his growing distress at his mother's repeated adulteries and desertions, a distress that finally causes him to shoot her dead, and a good thing too, I say. Her name, Natashya, was originally Nancy. She addresses her son, whom she had seriously thought of aborting, as "you little fake." She belongs to the same great group as Paul Hammer's mother, Gloria, née Gretchen. Natashya's son is the narrator: he writes a confessional memoir. The first part, which establishes the situation like the first act of a play, is full of elementary mistakes such as the use of "abandonment" for "abandon," "he's . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

did" for "he's . . . done," "climax" for "bottom," "invalid" for "valid" and "maturation" for "maturity," a sentence that inadvertently makes a typist raise her eyebrows with long-fingered grace, another that we have to read twice in order to be sure that it means that a lake was filled in, not created, another that is so clumsy it turns out not to be a sentence at all, etc., etc.; and we don't know whether to ascribe these to the highly intelligent boy or (things being as they are now with the English language) to Miss Oates. But in any case the quality suddenly begins to rise at the end of Part I and continues to rise throughout the rest of the novel, so that the last 48 pages sing and are brilliant. Miss Oates writes a very good brand of prose when she wants to and puts her mind to it. If she becomes a brand name—and it looks as if she may —she will be one of the better brands.

In 1896, after giving a series of Chautauqua lectures at Chautauqua itself, William James wrote, "Now for Utica and Lake Placid by rail, with East Hill in prospect for tomorrow. You bet I rejoice at the outlook—I long to escape from tepidity. Even an Armenian massacre, whether to be killer or killed, would seem an agreeable change from the blamelessness of Chautauqua as she lies soaking year after year in her lakeside sun and showers. . . . I have seen more women and less beauty, heard more voices and less sweetness, perceived more earnestness and less triumph than I ever supposed possible." (*Letters,* II, 43-4.) That is essentially the quality of the life lived by Mr. Bridge in the Crescent Heights suburb of Kansas City. Evan Connell's novel about him is a brilliant tour de force: a novel about tepidity that isn't tepid, quite the contrary, and a detailed portrait of a rather doughy *paskudnyak* with whom we sympathize even while we despise him. The fact that we find him not altogether unsympathetic is a large element in the deadliness of the portrait, some degree of sympathy being a necessary condition for credibility. Less blatant than Babbitt, less intelligent than Thomas Buddenbrook, he takes all the color and juice out of life. "I bleach," said Mother Sereda in *Jurgen.* Mr. Bridge bleaches. His children disavow his values, his wife unconsciously loses interest in him, his secretary tells him he has ruined her life by his impersonality, and he is bewildered. He hates Jews and Negroes; he loves listening to Nelson Eddy and Jeanette MacDonald; he thinks Roosevelt is wrecking the country; but he is not a churchgoer, he is not a pro-Nazi, he is not without spells of bewildered or self-satisfied reflection. He even has an element of kindness. His life is presented in a series of short episodes ranging in length from half a page to two or three pages, each complete in itself and structurally perfect: I suppose we could call them epiphanies. Novels come and go, but I think *Mr. Bridge* will be with us for quite a while. It can be read with pleasure again and again. That is the test.

Tony Nailles of *Bullet Park,* having been dropped from the high school football squad because of his low grades, started reading poetry,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"as if he shared, with the poets, the mysterious and painful experience of being forced into the role of a bystander." That is of course the basic trouble of Paul Hammer, who lives on inherited money, and even of Tony's hard-working father, who makes a good living "pushing mouthwash" but can hardly force himself to go to work of such inconsequence every day. In Mike Nichols' *The Graduate* we have a society of hard-working bystanders who have no idea that anything ails them. The trouble with Frederick Exley's fictional character Frederick Exley is that—like Tony Nailles and the Graduate—he knows he is a bystander.[6] *A Fan's Notes,* which Exley calls a fictional memoir and a fantasy, is one of the best new novels I have read in a long time; Exley the character is worthy of comparison with Antoine Roquentin, Zeno Cosini, and Thomas Mann's Dilettante. This is Exley the novelist's first novel; I think we have here a new talent worth taking very seriously indeed. He does say "timidness" for "timidity," and now and then he does something equally clumsy, but on the whole he writes better than most established novelists. Don't miss *A Fan's Notes.*

Some established writers, like Hemingway and Faulkner, decline in their old age; some, like Hugh Walpole and E. M. Delafield, were never very good; for whatever reasons, it often happens that a book by an established or brand-name writer is of little or no value. I have before me an even half-dozen books of this kind.[7] In Kingsley Amis' *I Want It Now* the familiar Amis adult brat gets soft in the head at the end, a switch that isn't worth making because the character is of no human significance either before or after. Sybille Bedford's *A Compass Error* is a novel of blackmail and detection and the kind of actorish "sophistication" made popular by Somerset Maugham, Adolphe Menjou, David Niven and W. C. Fields. The Nobel Prize winner Knut Hamsun's early novel *Victoria* (1898), newly retranslated, is as full of theatrical sobbing and heart-clutching as all his other novels. When I ask college students what modern novels they consider "relevant," they usually mention the Nobel Prize winner Hermann Hesse's *Journey to the East* and *Siddhartha.* They don't mention *Steppenwolf;* I'm afraid that in the future they may mention *Gertrude* (1910), now published here for the first time. Its only virtue is the negative one of not being mystical. It is a novel about love and musical creativity, full of pedestrian philosophizing and not in a class with *Jean-Christophe* or Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus.* Etienne Leroux's *The Third Eye* is a detective story written in a style that seems to be compounded of Ben Hecht, Rafael Sabatini, Anthony Hope, and the Burke who wrote *Limehouse Nights,*

[6] A FAN'S NOTES, by *Frederick Exley.* Harper & Row. $6.95.

[7] I WANT IT NOW, by *Kingsley Amis.* Harcourt, Brace & World. $5.75. A COMPASS ERROR, by *Sybille Bedford.* Alfred A. Knopf. $5.95. VICTORIA, by *Knut Hamsun.* Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $4.95. GERTRUDE, by *Hermann Hesse.* Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $4.95. THE THIRD EYE, by *Etienne Leroux.* Houghton Mifflin. $4.95. THE COLLECTED STORIES OF JEAN STAFFORD, by *Jean Stafford.* Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $10.00.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

whose first name escapes me. *The New Yorker* publishes excellent stories from time to time, but most of its stories are rather bland and harmless. Jean Stafford's *Collected Stories* are of this kind: very smooth and well done, but hardly re-readable.

R. Prawer Jhabvala's *A Stronger Climate* is a collection of stories of a far higher order—of the very highest order.[8] Four of them, incidentally, also appeared in *The New Yorker*. All nine of them deal with the effects of India's heat, light and culture on Europeans who stay there more than briefly; the first six, grouped under the subtitle "The Seekers," deal with those who feel the voluptuous agony of surrender to a way of life that can only destroy them as it destroys most of those who were born to it; the last three, under the subtitle "The Sufferers," deal with those who realize that they have been destroyed. Mrs. Jhabvala, a Polish refugee from Nazi Germany, educated at London University and married to an Indian architect, must be listed among the very small number of Continental Europeans who have learned to write English better than most of us whose native language it is: Conrad, Nabokov, Isak Dinesen, Ludwig Bemelmans, and—if we overlook the accident of his birth in Wisconsin—Thorstein Veblen. That she belongs in such good company is evident on every page. I open the book at random (pp. 122-3):

> Georgia often returned to the subject of what they were doing for India. She had a lot of feeling for the country and wanted every young Indian to devote himself heart and soul to its uplift. She told Ranjit all the things he ought to be doing—building dams, teaching peasants to read and write, defending the frontier—all the things *she* would be doing if only she had had the good fortune to be born an Indian. In England nowadays, she said, one felt so frustrated—there wasn't anything to do, only things to protest against.

Have you ever seen a clearer characterization in so few lines?

Leonard Michaels' *Going Places*[9] is a collection of stories less assured, less mature, and even, for all their use of newer techniques, less bold, the newer techniques having been tried and found true as long ago as —oh, say Biely's *Saint Petersburg* (1913), or Andreyev's "The Seven Who Were Hanged" (1908), and beyond him as far back as Sterne, and beyond him as far back as Rabelais, and beyond him . . . so that they are no longer as startling as they were when that old revivalist Joyce revived them in 1922. And even so, few people have the technical strength to use them without falling into formlessness, and Leonard Michaels uses them quite well. All honor and encouragement to him. This is his first book. It reminds me not so much of any other writer as of Chagall. But chiefly it is Leonard Michaels' own. He plays with language. Few writers of his generation can even work with it.

[8] A STRONGER CLIMATE, by *R. Prawer Jhabvala*. W. W. Norton. $4.95.
[9] GOING PLACES, by *Leonard Michaels*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $4.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Finally, we have three works by old masters.[10] John Dos Passos' *One Man's Initiation: 1917,* first published in a bowdlerized edition in 1920, is now published unbowdlerized, with a long introduction by Dos Passos and a number of pleasing charcoal sketches from his Paris notebook. He wrote it in August, 1918, on the ship coming back from France after the expiration of his year's enlistment as a volunteer ambulance driver in France and northern Italy. Does that remind you of another American writer? The novel itself is full of spots that read somewhat like the early Hemingway:

> They tried to hide their agitation. The schoolmaster poured out more wine.
>
> "Yes," said Martin, "there are fine orchards on the hills round here."
>
> "You should be here when the plums are ripe," said the schoolmaster.
>
> A tall bearded man, covered with dust to the eyelashes, in the uniform of a commandant, stepped into the garden.
>
> "My dear friends!" He shook hands with the schoolmaster and the old woman and saluted the two Americans. "I could not pass without stopping a moment. We are going up to an attack. We have the honour to take the lead."
>
> "You will have a glass of wine, won't you?"
>
> "With great pleasure."
>
> "Julie, fetch a bottle, you know which. . . . How is the morale?"
>
> "Perfect."
>
> "I thought they looked a little discontented."
>
> "No. . . . It's always like that. . . . They were yelling at some gendarmes. If they strung up a couple it would serve them right, dirty beasts."
>
> "You soldiers are all one against the gendarmes."
>
> "Yes. We fight the enemy but we hate the gendarmes." The commandant rubbed his hands, drank his wine and laughed.
>
> "Hah! There's the next convoy, I must go."
>
> "Good luck."
>
> The commandant shrugged his shoulders, clicked his heels together at the garden gate, saluted, smiling, and was gone.

It isn't Hemingway, it doesn't move with his speed, it doesn't have his concentrated force, but it is a product of the same situation and the same ways of sensibility that are reflected in Hemingway's good early prose, and it too reflects them. Dos Passos had not yet found what Henry James would have called his own note. This novel is of less interest in itself than as a document of literary history. Those who follow

[10] ONE MAN'S INITIATION: 1917, by *John Dos Passos.* Cornell University Press. $5.95. CASTLE TO CASTLE, by *Louis-Ferdinand Céline.* Delacorte Press. $7.50. SNOW COUNTRY AND THOUSAND CRANES, by *Yasunari Kawabata.* Alfred A. Knopf. $5.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fashion don't like Dos Passos now, for reasons that need no recounting here; but I find the *U.S.A.* trilogy still valid and moving; I am absolutely certain that it will survive the current disfavor, and I find *One Man's Initiation* a welcome appendix to it.

Céline's *Castle to Castle* is a novel in which the old son of a bitch tells how tragically misunderstood he has always been, him a hero of the first world war and a uniquely righteous man in the second. Sartre once said that when the Nazis retreated from France they took Céline along with the rest of the baggage. This novel is a delirious account of his internment in Denmark along with Pétain, Laval and other collaborators waiting for the end. It isn't in any way up to *Journey to the End of the Night* or *Death on the Installment Plan;* it is rather the obscene babbling of a gifted coward shaking with fear but still unable to resist dropping the names of the important people he knows and despises even as he despises himself and his publishers and his readers and his patients and his friends and his enemies and his benefactors and the court that convicted him and the court that exonerated him. The best parts of the book are three interviews that appeared originally in *The Paris Review* in 1960 and 1961. They are relatively sane.

Kawabata's two novels *Snow Country* and *Thousand Cranes* were discussed in the Spring issue of THE HUDSON REVIEW by Edward Seidensticker, who translated them. Since I don't read Japanese and have not previously read anything of Kawabata's, I can do no better, by way of reviewing this joint edition, than say that Seidensticker writes beautiful English and that on the basis of his translation I agree with his high estimate of Kawabata. As Herbert Howarth has demonstrated, the Nobel Prize for literature has lost a great deal of the credit it should have by being awarded to writers whose merits had long since been discovered and who in many cases had very little merit anyhow, and also by incurring the suspicion that it was sometimes awarded on political grounds. But no such reproach is justified in the case of Kawabata, if the quality of the rest of his work is comparable to that of these two novels. The following paragraph, so unlike anything I know of in Western literature, introduces us, in fiction at least, to a new kind of beauty:

> The Milky Way. Shimamura too looked up, and he felt himself floating into the Milky Way. Its radiance was so near that it seemed to take him up into it. Was this the bright vastness the poet Bashō saw when he wrote of the Milky Way arched over a stormy sea? The Milky Way came down just over there, to wrap the night earth in its naked embrace. There was a terrible voluptuousness about it. Shimamura fancied that his own small shadow was being cast up against it from the earth. Each individual star stood apart from the rest, and even the particles of silver dust in the luminous clouds could be picked out, so clear was the night. The limitless depth of the Milky Way pulled his gaze up into it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ALBERT SONNENFELD

The Paradox of Freedom

VICTOR BROMBERT IS DEFINITELY AMONG "the happy few." He knows more about Stendhal than anyone in this country, yet comes to his subject free of those fetters of pedantry which have so often condemned the writings of other knowledgeable *Stendhaliens* to long solitary confinement in the library carrels of research students. He has had the rare good sense and happy instinct to choose an author whose works are truly congenial to his own temperament and interpretative reflexes. As a result, one never feels the burden of forced labor in the groves of academe; Brombert allows the reader to enjoy both Stendhal enjoying his heroes' predicaments and Brombert enjoying Stendhal's enjoyment. This slim volume[1] grants the author of *The Red and the Black* a reprieve from what had threatened to be a permanent sentence to the classroom: instead of the usual textbook definitions of "crystallization," of "*beylisme*" and "energy," instead of the solemn pronouncements on Stendhal's historical position vis à vis Balzac in the development of the novel, we find a thematic study that treats Stendhal on his own playful terms as a creator of a unique world of poetic perspectives.

Because Stendhal (1783-1842) came to the novel so late in his life (*Le Rouge et le noir* of 1830 is contemporary with Balzac's first major novels), literary historians have erroneously viewed him as totally committed to nineteenth-century psychological realism. It is the same mistake we make in attaching an almost cabalistic Romantic value to Mozart's choice of C-minor for the 24th Piano Concerto. Julien Sorel's dynamic ascension in the France of 1830 has been likened to Rastignac's, even to Raskolnikov's; and Stendhal's novels have been used by the misguided faithful as breviaries of immoralism, as etiquettes of aggressive impoliteness. Each generation of readers has created its own Stendhal myth, Brombert points out. But the dominant image has been that of the apostles of energetic activism. For them, the key symbol is that of the perilous ladder leading to the room where morganatic consummation with the beloved takes place (cf. the same symbol in Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilych*). That is a very nineteenth-century view, one based on a retrospective reading of French history. The irritation Paul Valéry displayed at Stendhal's playful manipulation of his narratives might have been dissipated had he viewed *La Chartreuse de Parme* within the eighteenth-century tradition of Voltaire's *Contes* and of Fielding's *Tom Jones*. Julien and Fabrice are more like Candide and the English foundling than like Rastignac; the *allegro con brio* of the rhythm

[1] STENDHAL: FICTION AND THE THEMES OF FREEDOM, by *Victor Brombert*. Random House. $5.95 (paper: $2.45).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of adventure combines with Stendhal's inimitable tone to bring his major novels closer to picaresque than to *Bildungsroman*. But there is an essential difference too. If Candide ends by cultivating his garden and Tom Jones by living happily ever after, Julien Sorel is in prison heading for a fall and Fabrice Del Dongo retires to monastic meditation in the Charterhouse.

For Victor Brombert, Stendhal's conception of freedom is a fundamentally private one. Faced with the corruption of French conspiratorial politics in the 1830's and with the dangerous, if comical, subterfuge of the court of Ranuce-Ernest IV in Parma, how can Julien Sorel and Fabrice Del Dongo retain that youthful spontaneity which makes them so charming and irresistible? How in a counterfeit society can one's values remain genuine? In a world where the red and black uniforms of army and church have become the red and black squares of the chessboard of power and seduction, can one still enjoy the game without playing it? Can one mate without premeditation? or is the happiness of Candide and Tom Jones an edenic past irretrievably lost because of Adam's new curse of mediocrity? André Gide asked much the same question in *Les Caves du Vatican*. At first glance, Brombert's central thesis seem peculiarly *fin de siècle:*

> The most important function of the Stendhalian prison is that it restores his heroes to their own selves—or rather, that it allows them to discover the self, and even to create it. The prison thus assumes a protective and dynamic role. It liberates one from the captivity of social existence (p. 173).

The Symbolists, of course, withdrew to their ivory tower and gazed adoringly into Narcissus' reflecting pool. The real world was idea, not the debasing physical and economic contingencies of a Balzac: "Living, we can let our servants do that for us!" Kafka's "Hunger Artist," who hungers for no earthly nourishment but for hunger itself, finds freedom in a cage. But Stendhal's heroes are not fugitives from life. In one way, they resemble Albert Camus' "Stranger": they come to prison having lived life to the fullest. Meursault is sentenced to death because his immoralism constituted a moral indictment of an immoral society; the same could be said of Julien and Fabrice. Stendhal, however, goes Camus one better. Meursault, after repelling the attacks of various essentialist purveyors of posthumous happiness, comes to perceive *mentally* the joys of the physical sensations he had known in the sun; Julien and Fabrice, privileged creatures in Stendhal's fantasy life, experience the emancipation of sensual pleasure in prison itself during "visits" with Mme de Rênal and Clélia Conti. And each in the cell of himself learns the true lesson of freedom. Small wonder, then, that Julien regrets that one cannot lock the prison door from within, while Fabrice proclaims that he had never been so happy as in the Farnese Tower. Victor Brombert might well have subtitled his book "the paradox of freedom," for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

there is something almost baroque about Stendhal's prison imagery.

Lest I convey the impression that Brombert's study confines itself to variations on the themes of freedom, I hasten to mention other traditionally obscure areas illuminated by this perceptive critic. For one so excessively preoccupied with the authenticity of youth, Stendhal paradoxically waited until his own maturity before turning to the novel. The call of life's energies was stronger than the call to art, our interpretative instincts tell us. But Brombert demonstrates convincingly that Stendhal's autobiographical works of the 1830's reveal a mind incapable of viewing the self other than as both subject and object. The basic reflex of *fictionalizing* one's every situation makes Stendhal a character in his own novels: he is Julien, Fabrice, Mosca, as Bergler's psychoanalytical study shows; he is also the narrator intruding playfully in the novels, as Brombert himself has shown in an earlier book, *La Voie oblique* (1954). Threatened by the potential autonomy of his characters, Stendhal resorts to disloyal asides and disclaimers to protect his own mask. We get the illusion that Julien and Fabrice are real, since their "biographer" judges them as though they were accountable for their behavior to their creator. When disaster strikes Julien and he says of his past life: "My novel is over,"—his words formulate Stendhal's view of life as material for fiction.

In what is undoubtedly the best brief discussion available of Stendhal's almost compulsive love for Italy (pp. 129-139), Brombert suggests that the definitive study of Stendhal's private myth of Italy remains to be written. Knowing the author of *Fiction and the Themes of Freedom* to be an inveterate Italophile himself, I would suggest that he soon undertake this much needed project. But a cautionary note on style might be a useful viaticum before the Italian Journey begins; here and now it might prevent some irritation on the part of those anglophonic readers who may have felt themselves victims of Etiemble's wrath. Victor Brombert writes English with a distinctly French accent. While his lapses here are not as flagrant as those in his otherwise excellent Flaubert book[2] they seem to fall into such consistent patterns that the reader and author can be forewarned: outright Gallicisms in vocabulary ("oversusceptible protagonists," "delation is the least heinous activity," "cohabitation with one's own self-questioning"), and in sentence structure ("this usurpation is so habitual," "obstacle is almost elevated to the dignity of a theme"); overuse of tricky unamerican words ("affective availability," "interlocutress"); linguistically false aphorisms ("Boredom like execration is the prime condition of fervor,"); plural abstract nouns where English calls for a singular; excessive reliance on demonstrative adjectives and definite articles. But these are distinctly minor irritants in an otherwise eminently readable book, one free of academic jargon and pomp.

[2] *The Novels of Flaubert: A Study of The Themes and Techniques* (Princeton University Press, 1967).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MARVIN MUDRICK

Political Animals

GEORGE ORWELL,[1] WHO WAS A BRAVE MAN and a patriotic Englishman, didn't flinch from the job of defending Shakespeare against the often ridiculed but seldom answered attack by Tolstoy:

> He objects, with some justification, to the raggedness of Shakespeare's plays, the irrelevancies, the incredible plots, the exaggerated language: but what at bottom he probably most dislikes is a sort of exuberance, a tendency to take—not so much a pleasure, as simply an interest in the actual process of life. It is a mistake to write Tolstoy off as a moralist attacking an artist. He never said that art, as such, is wicked or meaningless, nor did he even say that technical virtuosity is unimportant. But his main aim, in his later years, was to narrow the range of human consciousness. One's interests, one's points of attachment to the physical world and the day-to-day struggle, must be as few and not as many as possible. Literature must consist of parables, stripped of detail and almost independent of language. The parables—this is where Tolstoy differs from the average vulgar puritan—must themselves be works of art, but pleasure and curiosity must be excluded from them. Science, also, must be divorced from curiosity. The business of science, he says, is not to discover what happens, but to teach men how they ought to live. So also with history and politics. . . .

Late Tolstoy doesn't usually provoke such conscientious discriminations, which are not less interesting for being truer of Orwell himself. *Animal Farm* and *1984,* for instance, might be described, far more damagingly than *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* and *Hadji Murad,* as "parables, stripped of detail and almost independent of language." Orwell too, in his novels or in his literary and political journalism, subordinates "pleasure and curiosity" to the "business" of "teaching men how they ought to live"; for (as he remarks in his essay on Dickens) "every writer" has "a 'message,' whether he admits it or not," and, though "not all propaganda is art," "all art is propaganda."

Orwell's "main aim," like old Tolstoy's, is "to narrow the range of human consciousness," to persuade the reader that his options are few and his time is short, that "his points of attachment to the physical world . . . must be as few . . . as possible." Unlike Tolstoy, however, Orwell doesn't exhort or impose: what he does, he does because he plainly is what he is; his substance doesn't exceed or contradict, it

[1] THE COLLECTED ESSAYS, JOURNALISM AND LETTERS OF GEORGE ORWELL (Vol. 1: AN AGE LIKE THIS; Vol. 2: MY COUNTRY RIGHT OR LEFT; Vol. 3: AS I PLEASE; Vol. 4: IN FRONT OF YOUR NOSE), edited by *Sonia Orwell* and *Ian Angus.* Harcourt, Brace & World. Vol. 3, $7.95; each of the other volumes, $8.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

isn't even conceivable apart from, his aim; he believes in belief; he is sincere. As for the old sinner Tolstoy, since he has so much of himself to keep down before he can settle for so little, he is as devious and uncomfortable as Shakespeare. Orwell, making lucid distinctions, fails to notice that Tolstoy's denunciation of Shakespearean exuberance is as exuberant as Shakespeare. Orwell is careful and sober (though not "the average vulgar puritan"), he is all conscience, and he can't imagine the level of principled insincerity at which such gigantic dreamers survive the wreckage of their dreams.

Tolstoy, moreover, was young once. In 1861 the young Tolstoy, full of projects, not yet the author of *War and Peace,* made a voyage to London, where he heard Dickens deliver a lecture on education and paid a visit to the famous exile, Alexander Herzen. Half a century later, speaking to a friend, Tolstoy remembered Herzen as a "plump little man":

> . . . who generated electric energy. "Lively, responsive, intelligent, interesting," Lev Nikolayevich explained (as usual illustrating every shade of meaning by appropriate movements of his hands), "Herzen at once began talking to me as if we had known each other for a long time. I found his personality enchanting. I have never met a more attractive man. He stood head and shoulders above all the politicians of his own and of our time."[2]

Tolstoy at eighty had little patience with politics or revolutionary socialism, and he didn't care for Westernized Russians; so his enthusiastic recollection testifies to Herzen's charm and conversation. Herzen was born in Moscow in 1812, just in time to be there during the great fire and Napoleon's occupation: his father was able to obtain Napoleon's permission to leave Moscow with his household by agreeing to carry a message to the Tsar in Petersburg. Later, by means of his influential political journalism, Herzen helped more directly to make history, and he was friendly with the leaders of all the republican movements in nineteenth-century Europe. When he set about writing his memoirs, he recorded the events of his childhood and youth with as much flavor and delight as if he were not a politician but Tolstoy:

> . . . an exclusive sentiment of nationality never leads to any good; it led me to the following incident. Among others who used to visit us was the Comte de Quinsonas, a French *émigré* and a lieutenant-general in the Russian service. A desperate royalist, he took part in the celebrated fête of Versailles, at which the King's life-guards trampled underfoot the popular cockade and at which Marie Antoinette drank to the destruction of the revolution. This French

[2] Quoted from P. Sergeyenko's book on Tolstoy, in Isaiah Berlin's Introduction to MY PAST AND THOUGHTS: THE MEMOIRS OF ALEXANDER HERZEN, translated by *Constance Garnett,* revised by *Humphrey Higgens.* Alfred A. Knopf. Boxed set of four volumes, $30.00.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

count, a tall, thin, graceful old man with grey hair, was the very model of politeness and elegant manners. There was a peerage awaiting him in Paris, where he had already been to congratulate Louis XVIII on getting his situation. He had returned to Russia to dispose of his estate. Unluckily for me this most courteous of the generals of all the Russian armies had to begin speaking of the war in my presence.

"But surely you must have been fighting against us?" I remarked with extreme naïveté.

"Non, mon petit, non; j'étais dans l'armée russe."

"What?" said I, "you, a Frenchman, and fighting in our army? That's impossible!"

My father glanced sternly at me and changed the subject. The Count heroically set things right by saying to my father that "he liked such *patriotic* sentiments.". . .

Or, with equal sympathy, he is a witness at the deathbed of his lonely, perverse, Voltairean father:

Klyucharëv, an extremely honest man who at that time was managing my father's business affairs and was more trusted by him than anyone, bent down to him and said:

"All the measures you have tried hitherto have been unsuccessful: allow me to advise you to resort to another remedy."

"What remedy?" asked the sick man.

"Won't you send for the priest?"

"Oh," said my father, turning to me, "I thought Grigory Ivanovich really had some remedy to advise."

Orwell remembers a different kind of childhood and youth, in the quite respectable boarding-school he attended:

It is not easy for me to think of my schooldays without seeming to breathe in a whiff of something cold and evil-smelling—a sort of compound of sweaty stockings, dirty towels, faecal smells blowing along corridors, forks with old food between the prongs, neck-of-mutton stew, and the banging doors of the lavatories and the echoing chamber-pots in the dormitories.

"From a very early age," he begins an essay entitled "Why I Write," "I knew that when I grew up I should be a writer. . . . I knew that I had a facility with words and a power of facing unpleasant facts . . ." He is at home among the unpleasant facts, and if they aren't altogether ubiquitous he will go anywhere to hunt them down, in the filthy kitchens of splendid French hotels, in prisons, in vile hostels for tramps and itinerant laborers, in workingmen's lodging-houses:

The squalor of this house is beginning to get on my nerves. Nothing is ever cleaned or dusted, the rooms not done till 5 in the after-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

noon, and the cloth never even removed from the kitchen table. At supper you still see the crumbs from breakfast. The most revolting feature is Mrs F being always in bed on the kitchen sofa. She has a terrible habit of tearing off strips of newspaper, wiping her mouth with them and then throwing them onto the floor. Unemptied chamberpot under the table at breakfast this morning. The food is dreadful, too. We are given those little twopenny ready-made steak and kidney pies out of stock. I hear horrible stories, too, about the cellars where the tripe is kept and which are said to swarm with black beetles. . . .

"Disgusting" is a word he always has at hand:

One result of the breakdown of religious belief has been a sloppy idealisation of the physical side of life. In a way this is natural enough. For if there is no life beyond the grave, it is obviously harder to face the fact that birth, copulation, etc are in certain aspects disgusting. . . .

This sort of self-fulfilling nausea has its antecedents in English literature: in Swift, for example, and—diluted with Wilde and water—in Shaw. Swift and Shaw were also cranks about language; as Orwell is, explaining how quantities of new words can be invented to enable us to make all our thoughts clear to one another:

The thing that suggests itself immediately is the cinematograph. Everyone must have noticed the extraordinary powers that are latent in the film—the powers of distortion, of fantasy, in general of escaping the restrictions of the physical world. . . . Properly used, the film is the one possible medium for conveying mental processes. . . . A millionaire with a private cinematograph, all the necessary props and a troupe of intelligent actors could, if he wished, make practically all of his inner life known. He could explain the real reasons of his actions instead of telling rationalised lies, point out the things that seemed to him beautiful, pathetic, funny, etc—things that an ordinary man has to keep locked up because there are no words to express them. In general, he could make other people understand him. Of course, it is not desirable that any one man, short of a genius, should make a show of his inner life. What is wanted is to discover the now nameless feelings that men have *in common*. All the powerful motives which will not go into words and which are a cause of constant lying and misunderstanding, could be tracked down, given visible form, agreed upon, and named. I am sure that the film, with its almost limitless powers of representation, could accomplish this in the hands of the right investigators, though putting thoughts into visible shape would not always be easy—in fact, at first it might be as difficult as any other art.

The really breathtaking looniness and ignorance of this paragraph

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

should be pondered by anyone sympathetic to Orwell's posthumous reputation as a distinguished writer and a paragon of reason.

Orwell was brave, honest, and political, qualities that in combination are perhaps rare enough to help justify a monument of four handsome volumes of miscellaneous writings. He detested "humbug" (another favorite word) and was adept at spotting it. He held, from at least as early as the Spanish War, to a set of convictions which made him a standing target from left and right: (1) that democratic socialism, though not inevitable and in fact becoming less and less likely, was the only hope of the world; (2) that "human society must be based on common decency, whatever the political and economic forms may be"; (3) that "common decency" was a function of bourgeois morality and of the civil liberties which have existed only under the bourgeois state; (4) that imperialism was the slave-economy with which the bourgeois state indispensably enriched itself at a safe distance from home; (5) that the Soviet Union was not Utopia or a degenerated workers' state but a monstrous tyranny. After World War II, especially once the Cold War had started, these convictions became the articles of faith for unaffiliated radicals, to whom Orwell seemed a tough-minded patriarchal prophet. But Orwell has no density or resonance. It's not surprising that *Animal Farm* and *1984* were both Cold-War Books-of-the-Month, runaway successes in America as exposés of Godless Communism.

Even the most lumpish American readers, tipped off by these unpuzzling fables, were able to ascertain that, for Orwell, the Soviet Union was the enemy; and nothing else was necessary. All art, says Orwell, is propaganda. The purpose of propaganda is to establish a collective rhetorical advantage for our side over an instantly identifiable collective enemy: the methods don't have to be very subtle, indeed if they're too subtle they may cause the audience to wonder which side is which; only the effect counts. Orwell is himself the very image of collective virtue ("common decency") and makes virtue seem easy if not exactly worthwhile.

Herzen is something else: what Orwell does by reflex Herzen must, out of his conscious choice of a political life, strain to do, learn to do, surrender his wit and vividness to do. Herzen was by right of birth and upbringing a wealthy and cultured member of the Russian gentry. His father was an eighteenth-century gentleman, a dandy of Catherine the Great's court, who survived with increasingly distrustful irony into the drill-sergeant reign of Nicholas I. Even a boorish despot like Nicholas, however, could not suppress the air of family, of domesticity and intimacy, which characterized the Russian upper-class attitude toward the Tsar, which is the element of boldness and freedom in the great ladies of Catherine's time as Herzen affectionately memorializes them, and which persevered even when the Tsar felt obliged to play the rôle of offended majesty against upper-class political refractoriness. A recognizable pattern for a member of the gentry was to spend his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

youth living on familiar terms with courtiers and government officials, going to the university to read Hegel and argue the need for political change with other well-born high-minded young men, being arrested by personal order of the Tsar and sent off to an isolated provincial town for a few years of punitive rustication, returning to Moscow or Petersburg for more familiarity and friendliness with government officials as well as more study and subversive night-long discussions under surveillance by informers and secret police, being arrested and sentenced to further rustication, and so on. This was Herzen's life in summary till the age of thirty-five; and in his memoirs his hatred of Nicholas is less striking than its tone of a bitter family quarrel:

> The government pardoned Passek, and never thought of restoring to him some part of his property. Wasted by exertions and privations, the old man took to his bed; they did not know what they should dine on the next day.
>
> At this time Nicholas was celebrating his coronation: banquet followed banquet, and Moscow was like a heavily decorated ballroom, everywhere lights, escutcheons and gay attire. . . . The two elder sisters, without consulting anyone, wrote a petition to Nicholas, describing the situation of the family, and begged him to review the case and restore their property. They left the house secretly in the morning and went to the Kremlin, elbowed their way to the front, and awaited the Tsar, "crowned and exalted on high." When Nicholas came down the steps of the Red Staircase, the two girls quietly stepped forward and held up the petition. He passed by, pretending not to notice them; an aide-de-camp took the paper and the police led them away to the police station.
>
> Nicholas was about thirty at the time and already was capable of such heartlessness. This coldness, this intransigence is characteristic of slight commonplace natures, cashiers, and tipstaffs. I have often noticed this unshakable firmness of character in postal officials, salesmen of theatre and railway tickets, and people who are continually bothered and interrupted. . . . They learn to look at a man without seeing him, and not to listen to him, although they are standing side by side. But how did this autocratic clerk train himself not to see, and what need had he not to be a minute late for a parade?
>
> The girls were kept in custody until evening. Frightened and shocked, they besought the police superintendent with tears to let them go home, where their absence must have alarmed the whole family. Nothing was done about the petition.

Herzen broke out of the circle of surveillance and banishment by receiving permission to travel to western Europe: he left in 1847, and he never returned to Russia. (Herzen tells the delicious story of discomfiting Nicholas and saving his inheritance. After 1848, when he refused to obey an Imperial command to return home, he became

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

officially a political exile, and Nicholas stopped payment on bonds he had inherited from his mother. Herzen persuaded the French banker, Baron James Rothschild, to intervene; Rothschild informed Nicholas that a pending Rothschild loan to Russia might be cancelled unless Herzen's bonds were honored; and the Tsar backed down.) Nicholas did not die till 1855: during his entire reign, which began with his suppression of the Decembrist uprising in 1825, he did not attempt a single act of political conciliation or reform. Since Herzen's commitment to revolutionary causes is seldom unambiguous, since he often uses the words without seeming to be possessed by the spirit, it is tempting to guess that his commitment had something to do with his loneliness in exile and his continually exacerbated outrage over Nicholas's policies. Anyhow, the cultured Russian gentleman is never altogether at ease, as Orwell is, in situations that solicit gestures of collective virtue; at the time of his first political banishment, for example:

> We stood with folded arms, making not the slightest sign that our hearts were touched by the Imperial and princely mercy.
>
> Then Shubinsky thought of another dodge and, addressing Ogarëv, said:
>
> "You are going to Penza; do you imagine that that is by chance? Your father is lying paralysed at Penza and the prince besought the Tsar to designate that town for you, that your being near might to some extent alleviate for him the blow of your exile. Do you not think that you have reason to thank the prince?"
>
> There was no help for it: Ogarëv made a slight bow. This was what they were trying to get.
>
> The good-natured old man was pleased at this, and next, I do not know why, he summoned me. I stepped forward with the devout intention of not thanking him, whatever he or Shubinsky might say; besides, I was being sent farther away than any and to the nastiest town.
>
> "You are going to Perm," said Prince Golitsyn.
>
> I said nothing. He was disconcerted and, for the sake of saying something, he added,
>
> "I have an estate there."
>
> "Would you care to send some commission through me to your steward?" I asked with a smile.
>
> "I do not give commissions to people like you—*Carbonari*," added the resourceful old man.
>
> "Then what do you wish of me?"
>
> "Nothing."
>
> "I thought you called me."
>
> "You may go," Shubinsky interposed.
>
> "Allow me," I replied, "since I am here, to remind you that you told me, Colonel, last time I was before the commission . . . "

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

All this melodramatic formality—the standing row of folded arms; the debating tactics of "Allow me, Colonel"—is the assertion of revolutionary virtue over these captors who persist in trying to palliate their sins by small acts of kindness. The sentence has already been passed, and nothing will be altered except history's impression of the scene: what a row of prigs! Young Herzen is enjoying his virtue and impudence, he values the old Prince's quick thinking; it is an amusing and complex scene, especially the atmosphere as of a not very stern and somewhat perplexed father trying to discipline his frisky sons without alienating them. But the compulsory priggishness—nothing for character and meaning, everything for effect—is a vulgar touch, out of Poe or socialist realism.

To the degree to which Herzen is a politician posing for campaign photos, this sort of vulgarity is acceptable to him, and it can spoil some of his most moving recollections. When his beloved wife was seduced by a family friend (a poet and fellow socialist) and died soon after, Herzen almost went mad with humiliation and grief: in his memoirs he tells the story with force and pathos and only a little self-protective sanctimony. But the effort is too much for him to keep up, politics breaks in, and, replying to a letter from Richard Wagner (who was a friend of the friend; Herzen's personal correspondence was carried on with terrifyingly public figures), he can't resist appealing to the verdict of history:

> I have come to know you through your fine work on the *chef d'oeuvre* of the future. You have excellently understood the bond uniting all the arts, which ought to be combined in harmonious, concrete creation. . . .
>
> A duel between him and me? Never! . . . As a socialist and a revolutionary, I appealed to the only authority I recognise. I had the manliness, the daring to submit the affair to the judgment of my friends the democrats. I showed the letters, I told the facts. My appeal raised a general outburst of condemnation. Herwegh's moral death was decreed. Despised by all decent men, excluded from the body of democrats, he will be forced to hide his ignominious existence in some remote corner of the world. For he will find no peace in France, Italy or Switzerland.
>
> I swear, and my friends swear it also—every day brings us a proof of it—that we are supported by all representatives of the militant revolution.

Meanwhile his wife was dead. Politics, preparing to take over from religion for these unillusioned nineteenth-century infidels, was becoming another manufacturer of wide-screen all-purpose prosthetic consolations.

For the exiled and bereaved the personal isn't enough, or it's too much to bear, and Herzen yearns for an assembly of secular saints, icons of suprapersonal nobility, touchstones of grace, like his friend

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the astonishing hero Garibaldi, during whose triumphal visit to England Herzen observes a characteristic scene:

> Various persons had gathered in the corridor; suddenly an old Italian, an emigrant from days long past, a poor fellow who made ice-cream, burst through, caught Garibaldi by the skirt of his coat and stopped him, burst into tears and said: "Well, now I can die. I have seen him, I have seen him!" Garibaldi embraced and kissed the old man. Then in broken and confused phrases, with the fearful rapidity of a peasant's Italian, the old man began telling Garibaldi his adventures, and wound up his speech with a wonderful flower of Southern eloquence:
>
> "Now I shall die at peace, but you—God bless you—live long, live for our country, live for us, live till I rise again from the dead!"
>
> He clutched his hand, covered it with kisses and went out sobbing.

Italian opera, no doubt; but opera by Verdi, in which the most grandiose public gestures can become shapely, humane, and passionate; and it is this sort of theater into which Herzen would like to transform the world. Herzen's stainless heroes are Garibaldi and Robert Owen, each a simple and generous man committed to realizing a grandiose public vision: to free Italy and inaugurate a republic; to found, in the midst of bourgeois society, model communities of unoppressed children and coöperative working adults. With these gentle large-scale pragmatists Herzen contrasts bloodthirsty large-scale theorists like Gracchus Babeuf, "the first French socialist" at the time of the Revolution:

> The time had come to restore . . . [the proletarian's] ancient, *inalienable* rights. . . . Where were they? Why is the proletarian the sovereign? Why is it to him that all the property plundered by others belongs? Ah! you doubt—you are a suspect fellow: the nearest sovereign takes you off to the citizen judge, and he sends you to the citizen executioner, and you will not be doubting any more! . . .
>
> Owen, seeing that people of the educated countries were growing up towards a transition to a new epoch, had no thought of violence and simply wished to help this development. Just as consistently from his side as Babeuf from his, he set about the study of the embryo, the development of the cell. He began, like all natural scientists, with a particular instance: his microscope, his laboratory, was New Lanark; his study grew and came to puberty along with the cell and led him to the conclusion that the high road to the installation of a new order was *upbringing*.

Herzen tells an anecdote about an early associate of Marx's, the German revolutionary Karl Peter Heinzen, a spiritual brother of Babeuf's, who wrote that "it would be sufficient to massacre *two millions* of the inhabitants of the globe and the cause of the revolution would go swimmingly":

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I cannot refrain from relating an extremely funny incident which happened to me in connection with this cannibalistic project. There was, and indeed still is, living in Geneva a Dr R., one of the most good-natured men in the world and one of the most constant and Platonic lovers of the revolution, the friend of all the refugees; he doctored them gratis as well as giving them food and drink. . . .
. . . it was to him as a friend of Heinzen's that I appealed . . . when the latter published his philanthropic programme.

"Why," I said to him, "does your friend write such pernicious nonsense? The reaction is making an outcry, and indeed it has every reason to: he's a regular Marat in a German setting! And how can one ask for two million heads?"

R. was confused, but did not like to give up his friend.

"Listen," he said at last: "you have lost sight of one fact, perhaps: Heinzen is speaking of the whole human race; in that number there would be at least *two hundred thousand Chinese.*"

"Oh, well, that's a different matter; why spare them?" I answered and for a long time afterwards I could never think of this mitigating consideration without bursting into insane laughter.

Herzen did not favor the numerical type of revolutionary rhetoric, and he grew less and less convinced of the usefulness of violence. Orwell, measuring Dickens the novelist and believer in education against Marx the advocate of violent revolution, comments: "If you hate violence and don't believe in politics, the only major remedy remaining is education." In other words, reduce your scale (forget the two hundred thousand Chinese) and extend your interests (think about individuals). Only, as Herzen gloomily concludes, education doesn't work any better than revolution or politics or model communities, because the mob is quite content to remain as it is:

Babeuf wished to *enjoin prosperity* and a communist republic on people.

Owen wished to educate them in a different economic way of living, incomparably more profitable for them.

Napoleon wanted neither the one nor the other; he understood that Frenchmen did not in fact desire to feed on Spartan broth and to return to the morality of Brutus the Elder, that they were not very well satisfied that on feast-days "citizens will assemble to discuss the laws and instruct their children in the civic virtues." But—and this is a different thing—fighting and boasting of their own bravery they do like.

. . . [Napoleon] was not a reproach to the mob, for he did not offend it by either his purity or his virtues . . . *he belonged himself to the mob* and he showed it its very self . . . elevated into a genius and covered with rags of glory.

Herzen, the man whose conversation charmed Tolstoy, would not

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

settle for the modest human scale of novelists; and the world is unwilling to sustain itself on the scale of grand opera. Between Garibaldi on the heights and Napoleon among the benighted masses were all the diverse unhistorical persons (including Heinzen's two million) who customarily escaped Herzen's attention, and who persisted in fascinating Tolstoy even after he had decided that for the sake of its soul he must narrow the range of the world's consciousness. Tolstoy is a Roman by late conviction, not by feeling and practice; whereas Herzen and Orwell are, after all, as Roman as Babeuf, proposing for Falstaff and Stiva Oblonsky purity and law and civic virtue, the same old web of "civilized" contracts and restraints that didn't prevent Herzen's grief and humiliation or his wife's stupidly premature death. Even civic virtue isn't immune to the private and personal.

Perhaps, like others who live for causes and the future, Herzen and Orwell had an affinity with deaths and endings. While they were still in their thirties, they reported the death of Europe: Herzen, from the dismantled barricades of Paris in 1848; Orwell, from Spain in 1937, when every revolutionary in sight was being jailed on the orders of the Communist Party. Each man lived the rest of his life in a mood of deepening skepticism about political action, yet each continued to be preoccupied with politics and public affairs, and neither seems to have imagined any satisfactory alternative to this preoccupation. As skeptics and spectators (Herzen began writing his memoirs at the age of forty), they were remote from the self-generating momentum of both the fanatical theorist and the practical leader. History had betrayed them, but, in "tumultuous, revolutionary ages like our own" (Orwell's dead phrase), they had nothing else; they remained faithful to causes and ideals that were unlikely to get another serious chance during their lifetimes, and, especially Orwell, they sounded more and more like incorruptible morticians:

> The Spanish war and other events in 1936-37 turned the scale and thereafter I knew where I stood. Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, *against* totalitarianism and *for* democratic Socialism, as I understand it. It seems to me nonsense, in a period like our own, to think that one can avoid writing of such subjects. Everyone writes of them in one guise or another. It is simply a question of which side one takes and what approach one follows. And the more one is conscious of one's political bias, the more chance one has of acting politically without sacrificing one's aesthetic and intellectual integrity.

The worst one can say of Orwell is that he doesn't seem a hypocrite when he mentions his (or "one's") "aesthetic and intellectual integrity." What a burden to take to an early grave! Herzen, at least, had a childhood, a disastrous marriage, some shining heroes, and pyrotechnical talk for a visiting young Russian novelist, before he gave up the ghost.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PATRICK CRUTTWELL

Man Meets Dog

THE NAME AND FAME OF J. R. Ackerley have hardly, so far as I have observed, crossed the Atlantic. I see no good reason why they should have: but no one conversant with the English literary scene over the last forty years or so can have failed to remark the existence of an "Ackerley claque," a steady, intensive, effective puffing in which such phrases as "minor masterpiece," "small masterpiece," "minor classic," etc., set the keynote. Ackerley wrote three books in his lifetime, *Hindoo Holiday* (1932), *We Think the World of You* (1960), and *My Dog Tulip* (1965). He died in 1967, and now there appears his fourth and presumably last work, *My Father and Myself*.[1]

All his books are really autobiography, though one, *We Think the World of You,* covers the fact with a very thin coating of fiction. This posthumous work is far more explicit about himself than were any of its predecessors, partly, I suppose, because it *is* posthumous, partly because things can now be printed in much detail which were totally "unprintable" not many years ago. The story it tells is in itself fascinating. Its essence is given in the opening sentence: "I was born in 1896 and my parents were married in 1919." From this one may deduce, correctly, that this is going to be yet another revelation of that extraordinary "hidden life" of irregular sex which flourished so profusely—and was concealed so successfully—under the bland lid of Victorian and Edwardian respectability. Ackerley's father, Roger, had refrained from marrying his mother—though he lived with her through most of those twenty-three years in the utmost openness and bourgeois domesticity, complete with butler and coachman and all —for reasons which seem to have varied as the years rolled by. First it was because he stood to lose a considerable allowance from the father of a previous wife (who had died); then because he had acquired yet another mistress, on whom he begot two daughters—the very existence of this irregular union number two being unknown to the mistress and two sons of irregular union number one—and finally, perhaps, through the sheer force of procrastinatory inertia. That he did eventually marry Ackerley's mother may have been due (so Ackerley suggests) to emotional shock and remorse caused by the death of Ackerley's brother in the first world war; but when the father himself died, it was the other woman, not Ackerley's mother, who stood at his deathbed.

All this in itself was odd enough: but there were even odder features in the career of Ackerley *père*. Originating from a poor family in the North of England, he had left school at 13, and at 16 he "ran away and joined the Army"—joined, in fact, first the Royal Horse Guards

[1] MY FATHER AND MYSELF, by *J. R. Ackerley*. Coward-McCann. $5.00.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and then the Second Life Guards, those imposing silver-cuirassed and red-plumed anachronisms whom you are liable to see on the "Come to Britain" tourism advertisements. From the life of a trooper in the Guards, Roger Ackerley was rescued by the patronage of two wealthy upper-class gentlemen, who bought him out of the army. Exactly why they did this Ackerley, the son, was never quite able to prove; but he clearly hints—and in fact there seems no other explanation—that the wealthy upper-class gentlemen had fallen passionately in love with the very handsome, youthful, proletarian soldier; for, as Ackerley remarks—and was himself to prove—"His Majesty's Brigade of Guards had a long history in homosexual prostitution."

Once off his launching-pad, Roger Ackerley's ascent was sensational. He went into the fruit-importing business, he was a great success in it, and he finished as a very wealthy man popularly known as the Banana King. (Bananas, from the Canaries and the West Indies, were the staple of his fruit-importing trade.) Whether this success-story is exactly a *moral* story, I wouldn't undertake to say; but it is certainly an interesting example (some people might say, a typically English example) of how to defeat the inequalities and injustices of class.

So much for *My Father:* now for *Myself.* This, I must say, I found much less interesting. Ackerley senior seemed to me in every way a more rewarding character than his son. *His* part of the book is a dreary account of his own homosexual "love-life"—though no word, in truth, could be more inapplicable, for the one thing never involved in it was love. He was always seeking for what he called the Ideal Friend—by which he meant a young man or boy who would do exactly what Ackerley wanted, who would have no will, no character of his own, nothing but a beautiful subservient body and a totally uncritical mind. Not surprisingly, he never found the Ideal Friend in human shape; not surprisingly, his sexual life degenerated into a miserable haunting of the West End pubs frequented by guardsmen and sailors ready to be picked up for one pound sterling and a few pints of beer. This account makes very clear what I have noticed in many other sources: the degree to which homosexuality in upper-class English society has been a means of breaking the subtle barriers of class; for the guardsmen, as Ackerley says himself, were "working-class, drilled to obedience." All things in England come down to Class, as all things in America come down to Race. Class in England is certainly less murderous than Race in America, but in some ways it can be harder to cope with. It is elusive, Protean: you may never know by what subtle signs you have just proved yourself to be not (as my grandmother used to say) "quite *quite.*"

From this misery of sailors and guardsmen, Ackerley junior was eventually rescued, as his father had been from the life of a trooper—but the method was considerably more original. He was rescued by a happy marriage, which lasted for fifteen years, with a German shepherd bitch. "Marriage" is the only word for it, though Ackerley says he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

never "had sexual intercourse with her"; for, in his own words:

> From the moment she established herself in my heart and home, my obsession with sex fell wholly away from me. The pubs I had spent so much of my time in were never revisited, my single desire was to get back to her, to her waiting love and unstaling welcome.

He wrote two books about her: *My Dog Tulip,* which is directly autobiographical, and *We Think the World of You,* which introduces her as a character in a triangular relationship, such as often happened in his real life, between himself, one of his young men, and the latter's jealous and interfering wife. And it is to Tulip that *My Father and Myself* is dedicated. He realised, when he had acquired her, what he had really been looking for all the time—what shape the Ideal Friend might have taken, had such a shape been possible:

> Yet looking at her sometimes I used to think that the Ideal Friend, whom I no longer wanted, perhaps never had wanted, should have been an animal-man, the mind of my bitch, for instance, in the body of my sailor, the perfect human male body always at one's service through the devotion of a faithful and uncritical beast.

Ackerley's was certainly an interesting "case" in the annals of sexual oddity, just as his father's was in those of Victorian duplicity. But what of him as a writer? What of that "underground reputation" which the blurb of this book talks about? What of that "Ackerley claque" which I mentioned at the outset? One doesn't want to become paranoiac about it—seeing the Hidden Hand of the Queer in every inexplicable phenomenon, as other paranoiacs see the Hidden Hand of the Jew or the Pope—but I must admit my own inability not to see it here. Besides this, Ackerley was a very considerable "power behind the throne" in the literary London of the thirties to the fifties. For the greater part of that time he was literary editor of *The Listener,* the weekly journal of the B. B. C. Its reviews were influential, and it followed, then, the reprehensible practice now limited to the *Times Literary Supplement,* of preserving its reviewers' anonymity.

Put these facts together, and perhaps it is not hard to understand some of the gross over-valuing of Ackerley's work. His books have all of them a mincing, uneasy, affected air; they are, in a way, "beautifully written," in a style whose plainness is clearly meant to offset the "queerness" (in all senses) of what is being related. But one has always a feeling that the writer is posing; he shifts about uneasily between self-pitying pathos and salacious tittering. And right at the center of it all is a dreadful hard selfishness. He was aware of it, certainly. "I was not out to give pleasure," he says, "but to get it"; and when a friend asked him flatly: "Do you really care about anyone?" he had to admit that the answer might be "No." To that degree, his work is an honest reflection of himself: but it is not the kind of reflection that true creation is made from.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WILLIAM DICKEY

A Place in the Country

> In the place that is my own place, whose earth
> I am shaped in and must bear, there is an old tree growing . . .
> —Wendell Berry, "The Return"

THE POEM DEFINES both a person and a place, a world in which, whether it is literal or metaphorical, the speaker of the poem has in some serious way to live. Prospero on his island, Pope in London, Prometheus on his rock—in each instance we feel that the figure and his context are not really separable, that each explains the other, and that only by the involvement of that explanation can their meaningful identities be revealed. A corollary about language follows. When the relationship of person and place is understood with exactness and intelligence, when it is understood as completely as possible, the poetic language is able to be elegant. I mean to use the word as it is used in the physical sciences, where elegance is a measure of rightness: an explanation is elegant when, in the most economical and coherent fashion possible, it explains everything that then needs to be explained. These questions presented themselves strongly to me as I read the books I am to review, because it seemed to me that when the relationship of person and place failed, so too did the relationship of person and person. And when that happened I thought the language too was often at fault, reduplicating itself, detaching itself from an honest representation of objects and from its necessary source in idiomatic speech.

The book which struck me most sharply as establishing no serious relationship between person and context was Anne Sexton's *Love Poems*.[1] For while Sexton's world is full of objects, they have no independent validity; they exist as projections of her own indulgent emotional states:

> On the day of breasts and small hips
> the window pocked with bad rain,
> rain coming on like a minister,
> we coupled, so sane and insane.
> We lay like spoons while the sinister
> rain dropped like flies on our lips
> and our glad eyes and our small hips.

Anne Sexton's pattern is one of momentary connections and asser-

[1] LOVE POEMS, by *Anne Sexton*. Houghton Mifflin. $4.00.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tions of different kinds: "On the day of," "We lay like spoons," "minister-sinister." Their problem is that they do not reinforce one another—indeed, they often seem hardly to understand one another. If they could do so, their coherence might itself provide what would be understandable as a world. But Anne Sexton rejects that possibility:

> The hand had collapsed,
> a small wood pigeon
> that had gone into seclusion.
> I turned it over and the palm was old,
> its lines traced like fine needlepoint
> and stitched up into the fingers.
> It was fat and soft and blind in places.
> Nothing but vulnerable.
>
> And all this is metaphor.

I said "indulgent" because indulgence seems to me to behave this way: to admit everything but a sense of relative importance; to permit all metaphors and then to dismiss them as metaphor. The emotional consequence of such an admission is pathos: we are asked to respond to an epiphenomenon, to emotion detached from judgment; to believe in the existence of a center because things are so busy at the peripheries:

> So I fell apart. So I came all undone.
> Yes. I was like a box of dog bones.
> But now they've wrapped me in like a nun.
> Burst like firecrackers! Held like stones!

The more closely one looks at these images, the less increment they are able to provide. Anne Sexton skims from the surface of an exterior world what is moment by moment most like her, and refuses the resonances an object may have in itself. In doing so she loses the force of an accumulating structure. She also loses, I think, the ability to judge the possible extent of language:

> She took you the way a woman takes
> a bargain dress off the rack
> and I broke the way a stone breaks.
> I give back your books and fishing tack.
> Today's paper says that you are wed.
> At night, alone, I marry the bed.

The final line of this stanza, from "The Ballad of the Lonely Masturbator" is a refrain line, and is repeated seven times. Here, rather than rejecting natural possibilities of association, Anne Sexton attempts to force resonance on a line which has very little inherent complexity.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The line begins by sounding flat, and comes eventually to sound absurd. But because Anne Sexton does not seriously connect her emotions with a continuous world outside them, absurdity, the failure of believable human proportion, is the last thing she can be expected to identify.

I'm not sure that Anne Sexton really wants to rely on exactness of language alone to gain what she wants to gain—after all, in the picture she has chosen for her book-jacket, she has been careful to provide us with a single perfect tear. But her lively disregard of the hard spine of language is echoed in the uneasiness several other poets exhibit in their efforts to define an effective and contemporary poetic diction.

Perhaps the uneasiness can be shown in passages which, by chance, deal with a shared image: that of a jellyfish. Here is William Pitt Root, the first stanza of "The Jellyfish":[2]

> There isn't much a man can do
> about a grounded jellyfish
> except step over it, or prod
> it with his walking stick, and if
> he has no walking stick, his shoe.
> My feet were bare, so I leaned
> to watch the waves relax around
> the shiny melted-looking heap.

Norman Talbot, "Lonely Girl Gathering Jellyfish":[3]

> A child gathers her bucket full of eyes
> along the swollen shore, traps all she can discover
> & sees the colours waiting in her gritty prize;
>
> she swings them through the sea & lifts unescaping
> the fluctuant hypnosis their tears cover—
> vulnerable, flayed retinas of sea, scraping . . .

Laurence Lieberman, "Men-of-War":[4]

> They were a most
>
> innocuous-looking lot,
> paralytic, dumb, like plastic puffballs
> or long-discarded water wings
> especially designed for children's dolls
> (that resemblance which, of all, the most redeems),
> trailing ultramarine threads
> arbitrarily clinging at unfinished seams— . . .

Each of these passages reveals some uncertainty about what to do with

[2] THE STORM AND OTHER POEMS, by *William Pitt Root*. Atheneum. $2.45.
[3] POEMS FOR A FEMALE UNIVERSE, by *Norman Talbot*. South Head Press (Sydney, Australia). $4.00.
[4] THE UNBLINDING, by *Laurence Lieberman*. Macmillan. $4.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the object, and the uncertainty is like Anne Sexton's in that it can't quite let the object sit still. Even Root, who begins prosaically enough, must moralize a little:

> As I tried to remove
> the notion from my mind, the mound
> it moved in, like a glassy brain,
> was taken from me by a wave
> that slid from the ocean without a sound.

The abstraction of the object comes earlier in the other poems: "Vulnerable, flayed retinas of sea," "(that resemblance which, of all, the most redeems)."

In all these instances, I think the poets feel obliged to make a little world go a long way. When there is no felt relationship with a society, a whole and rational world of people, it is not surprising to find the microcosm of object exalted, and to find any of its elements given a greater weight than might otherwise be the case. But that weight tends also, in the absence of real object, to express itself in over-extension and in over-insistence. I read this passage from Talbot, subtitled "Written while the Americans were invading Viet Nam" to a class:

> Flowers clot in the statesman's victory breath
> & the bloodlists thicken in his nasal drool.
> Flowers in the forest clot with his spray
> that stuccoes the wounds to scab. No one feels
> wet when the pellets of blood are sucked dry.
> The Bourbons are restored again every age
> & always the burning man submerged, submerged.

The class responded as I had; they said simply "I don't believe it." And there isn't any reason to believe it, at least as a comment on Vietnam. It is an elaboration of image disguising itself as a statement of moral intention, when a truly immediate and accessible poetic language of social and moral intention does not appear available. It is both too long and too extreme to be believable; the people we believe say what they mean more quickly than that.

Talbot and Root raise not only the question of an appropriate poetic language, but also the question of the relation of that language to traditional fixed forms. Their assumption is an intermediate one: forms may continue their poetic existence and efficacy, but only to the extent that they are modified from regularity. Here are excerpts from two villanelles:

> "At my age, an unimportant spasm.
> The heart's a sturdy organ, very strong.
> They tell me it's no more than that,
>
> "and who am I to argue? I'm not fat,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not nervous. I'm used to working all day long.
At my age, an unimportant spasm . . .

(Root, "Malfunction")

It is not easy why I'm linked with you—
humans involved are outside all the laws
& we are taunted by a point of view.

Our rhythms meet the way a dancer's do—
love can be lifting, another love can pause:
it is not easy why I'm linked with you

but love knits each void we are meeting through.
Since we have different loves for all the flaws
we are taunted by a point of view.

(Talbot, "Double Bed Villanelle")

It can certainly be argued that the presence of the fixed forms here has an ironic intention, but that seems almost too simple an explanation. I am more inclined to regard the presence of the fixed forms as a superstition, a desperate effort to find some mediatrix, other than the uncertain one of elevation and elaboration of poetic diction, between the fact and the poetry. That the fixed form can only be used as it varies from regularity confirms my opinion: the real form is outside the present body of poetry, which cannot incorporate it, because the assurance of the idea of regular patterning is absent, but which still needs to refer to it, to show what possibilities might exist if only coherence would somehow assert itself again.

I can't say that any of these three books seems very attractive to me, and I think that's because, in terms of the failure to confront either form or diction head-on, the poems strike me as irresponsible. Irresponsibility is for Anne Sexton a kind of virtue: she is responsible to no one but herself and her ephemeral emotions, and if the alarm sounds she will pack her uterus ("In Celebration of My Uterus," p. 12.) and get out of town. But something more disquieting happens with Lieberman. If I am to believe that the speaker of the poem has been involved in an automobile accident in which several people have been killed, I may find the tone too embroidered for the occasion:

Earth bucked and whinnied.
I clung to a saddle of roots. A Jag
Had thrown me. This bronco I
Could ride, immune to earth-lurch, till my flesh was

Putty. A silver badge
Shone. Queer to be spotted, squatting
There. I wore a face.
No cuts? No blood? Slap, his hand said, twice.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Even if the situation is invented, does this diction constitute a legitimate degree of serious distance? It may be indicative that Lieberman is often working in a mixed form, half poetry, half scenario, where italicized lines carry a moral commentary and where visual juxtaposition is also often intended to exercise the force of comment. In these circumstances an easy visual irony may readily pervade, and the weight of the eventual judgment be consequently insecure.

Analogous difficulties mar the work of Root and Talbot. At its worst, Root's language dissolves into quasi-ritual abstraction:

> Slowly, Lord, and surely, from the first
> and lasting dream shall issue all
> our sudden lives, shaped of flesh
> conceived in loss, and riven by desire.

Talbot is capable of an equally empty historical abstraction:

> in the voice of Tara fallen
> & the green towns of Genghis,
> the shaman empires lost in snow
> & Mohenjo-Daro pale in fingered
> dust—& Camelot under the soil
> too, Camelot under the grass-
> fired rooftree, but always the cradle
> flooddance of the Nile's
> naked love, when earth
> is as naked as fire.

II

The difficulty with these books has been in finding a basis of image and a rhetoric adequate to the seriousness of the poetic intention. The opposite problem may also exist: when one finds the seriousness of intention inadequate to the possibilities of poetic expression.

D. J. Enright's book[5] is published in a series called "The Phoenix Living Poets," but the force of the series title may almost seem excessive when one confronts passages like this:

> And yet, when it was done,
> Expeditiously and quietly done—
> An emperor, a Jove, a breaker of hearts,
> A queen, a Venus, a breaker of hearts.
> Larger than life—unfair, unfair!
> From time to time men die, it would seem,
> For love, and the crocodiles eat them.

Enright seems to be a splendid representative of a current emptiness in British poetry. Starting with a world that has much in common

[5] UNLAWFUL ASSEMBLY, by *D. J. Enright*. Chatto and Windus. 18s.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with the grey-and-white of John Wain or Phillip Larkin, Enright reduces the possibilities further:

> Where is that sought-for place
> Which grants a brief release
> From locked impossibilities?
> Impossible to say,
> No signposts point the way.

No one can argue that this stanza too strongly elevates its subject, because the subject remains so largely indeterminate. It is the *reductio* of a particular tone—eventually the Auden-MacNeice double-abstraction machine: "Locked impossibilities." But Enright takes the tone beyond the point where its flatness is still capable of commenting positively or negatively on ideas or objects, to the point where the absence of real comment is the only permissible tone. Both in his substance and in his tone, Enright has gone as far as seems immediately possible in creating a mechanical language before the machine actually writes it. The defeat of person by context, and the consequent loss of a language that is other than informational, is surely signalled by the title poem of Enright's book:

> UNLAWFUL ASSEMBLY
>
> This vale of teargas,
> More a hospital than an inn.
>
> Clarity begins at home,
> How far does it spread?
>
> A gathering is a mob,
> Mobs are to be dispersed
>
> Back to their homes
> (Lucky to have one)
>
> Back to their jobs
> (Lucky to have one)
>
> Why subscribe to clarity?
> In this vale of teargas
>
> Should one enter a caveat,
> Or a monastery?

The reduction of the *conclusion* of a poem, as opposed to a given moment in it, to a rhetorical device as conscious as zeugma, appears, in its determined destruction of the seriousness of context, to be a form of poetic suicide.

The same impulse, though moderated, attacks John Woods's new book, which fails finally to produce either a positive or an ironic

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

vision that can be of use.[6] Woods is so much more intelligent a man than he appears to be here that one can only wonder what form of impediment afflicts him. The ironies of this book are transparent and repetitive, as in "Simples":

> I can hear, in Iowa,
> a thousand frigid wives
> turning on their beds
> like the pages of Gideon Bibles
> in the motel rooms
> of their husbands.

Woods is not by nature a sarcastic or ironic poet, but that voice is dominant here if only because no other can manage to establish itself independently. "The Mouse Catcher," for instance, is not only *for* James Dickey, it is in a large measure *by* him:

> I rose from my flesh like a vapor
> Above fullback fatherly shoulders
> With the scars of too many missions
> Singing like eels in my neck.
> I practiced pursuit curves in the rafters . . .

These lines sound like parody, but the poem as a whole is not sure whether it wants to sound like parody or not. The parodic or imitative gesture, the categorizing, the negative, these warp and debase Woods's speech, which is fundamentally lyric, by reducing the central relationships of lyric to triviality:

> Not the trembling time
> in the first night hall
> when we gave our fears
> and stiff prides away.
> Not the shambled end
> when we shrank in each other's eyes.
> But the full time
> that seemed the death of time,
> as over the flick and tantrum of meadowgrass
> we set our rich aspic.

The poem is one which intends initially to establish a clear sense of the resonant lyric: of an expansive language. But that possibility is petulantly defeated in the last two lines, by the brutal trivialities of "flick" and "tantrum" and "aspic." It is that manner of defeat that dominates Woods's book, and that ruptures the relationship of person and context. The book does indeed, as its title suggests, keep out of trouble; more ominously, it tries to fulfill the line of one of its poems: "I spend as little time as possible anywhere."

[6] KEEPING OUT OF TROUBLE, by *John Woods*. Indiana University Press. $4.50.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

III

It is not so much of a distance from Woods to James Wright,[7] except that the perspective turns round, and issuing from that infinitesimal hole at the bottom of the Inferno, we manage somehow to look up again and see the stars.

I don't know quite why I say that; the poems won't directly justify me, for they are as sad as ever. But they seem less entirely convinced of their sadness: they begin to have that quiet ability of being before dawn, where Woods's poems, this time, are evidently later than something. Wright's poems are in a way less good as poems and better as symptoms, and so it is perhaps phrases more than poems that one remembers: the person and the place beginning to re-establish their difficult and intense knowledge of one another, as they give up their dreams of remote winters, the ease and the comfortable numbness of the snows:

> My life was never so precious
> To me as now.
> I gape unbelieving at those two lines
> Of my words, caught and frisked naked.

It's the nature of this book to present a few texts of new understanding, and a body of rabbinical comment on them. Thus "my life was never so precious" begets an extreme comment:

> Soon I am sure to become so hungry
> I will have to leap barefoot through gas-fire veils of shame,
> I will have to stalk timid strangers
> On the whorehouse corners.
>
> Oh moon, sow leaves on my hands,
> On my seared face, oh I love you.
> My throat is open, insane,
> Tempting pneumonia.

These are awkward lines, vulnerable but ambitious, trying for more than they accomplish, and in their energy contradicting the mock-misery of their conclusion. They are entirely typical of Wright's book, which shifts from the exact to the over-stated with astonishing suddenness. We move by page on page from the pretentiousness of:

> It is the trillium of darkness,
> It is hell, it is the beginning of winter,
> It is a ghost town of Etruscans who have no names
> Any more.

to the extreme restraint of:

[7] SHALL WE GATHER AT THE RIVER, by *James Wright*. Wesleyan University Press. $2.00.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I was alone once, waiting
For you, what you might be.
I heard your grass birds, fluting
Down a long road, to me.
Wholly for you, for you,
I was lonely, lonely.

The book, like the passage, is waiting, and I think for something sparer and clearer. What is done well here was already done well in *The Branch Will Not Break*; it is the perturbations of that pattern that suggest, as the startling heroic couplets of the introductory poem suggest, a new and a more recalcitrant departure.

Whatever the position of Wright's poetry may be, it derives, as it is right for American poetry to do, a considerable amount of its force from its exact geography: Nicollet Island, Stateline Nevada, the headwaters of the Minnesota. Something of that same sense of location is also a necessity for the poetry of George Elliott,[8] which at its easiest and most colloquial might almost deserve the popular statement: "I hardly knew it was poetry I was reading at all."

"At its easiest" means, for me, the long poem "Fever and Chills," which was published independently by the Stone Wall Press, in a very handsome private edition, several years ago. The short continuous narrative line of that book seems to be Elliott's most effective poetic language:

In the second summer of this,
They parked one noon by a locked gate
Which all six climbed through, and they packed
The furniture of the outing
Through a field of bearded grasses
And down a gully in the sea cliff.

That it is effective is owing to the fact that it is very much determined by both location and occasion: the sense of something happening at a particular time in a known kind of place. And because the language is not imposed upon the happening, but is felt rather to be generated by it, limits are persistently present which will prohibit the inappropriate, or the unnecessary, or the absurd. Defined as it is by its story, the poem does not need to make some of the awkward efforts toward public pronouncement and a public rhetoric that Woods or Talbot uneasily engage in; if anything public is to be said, it will be because it is appropriate to that moment of the poem, and its tone of voice will relate to spoken language—the language that could be spoken at that special time and place.

Mostly Elliott remains faithful to defined occasions, and they serve him faithfully and clearly. When he excludes the framework, the temptation of too great a degree of abstraction can easily be present, as in this passage from "A Course of Love":

[8] FROM THE BERKELEY HILLS, by *George P. Elliott*. Harper and Row. $4.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Two years we talked, and judged,
Tempting and shy; then loved.
"Let this perfection be brief." One year we have
Statically improved,

And all twelve months I thought:
"Only our luck is strange;
Our pleasure is the gauge of prudence." Today,
Eventlessly, something changed.

Ironies, verbal inventions, whatever departs very markedly from the tone of the natural speaking voice is likely in Elliott to seem empty or at least strained: "The clerk and his wife talked/ Graphs of weather: 'What/ Do the meters of climate mean/ By these jags of changes?' " Elliott's genius is to be direct, to observe carefully, to report quietly and without an intrusion of comment:

WOMEN SHELLING NUTS

Disposed to the bare sun's delight
For an hour in front of the radiant wall
Four chattering women spread their limbs,
Pull up their skirts, roll their sleeves,
And shell walnuts with slow fingers.

The birds above them in the branches
Of a blossoming quince turn their words
To brown irregular songs, and shake
On the old women spread on benches
Afternoon petals of mild light.

This kind of care to exclude what is distracting or merely neutral to the occasion permits its elements to show the strength and centrality of their real relationships: the birds can turn words to brown irregular songs only if we have already seen the intimate dependence these parts of the occasion have to one another. The phrase becomes then not an ornament or a trick, but a natural expression of the essential composition. The conviction that this is a whole poem derives from the fact that the parts of the poem seem aware of and interested in one another.

Like Elliott, Robert Penn Warren is probably still best known as a novelist, and again like Elliott, he brings many of the novelist's narrative virtues to his poetry.[9] He has the ability to identify and use fully the central elements of a situation, the ability I have just been speaking of:

All day, cicadas,
At the foot of infinity, like
A tree, saw. The sawdust

[9] INCARNATIONS, POEMS 1966-1968, by *Robert Penn Warren*. Random House. $4.00.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Of that incessant effort,
Like filings of brass, sun-brilliant,
Heaps up at the tree-foot. That
Is what day is.

Warren also has, for both good and evil, the novelist's sense of a continuing and complex structure of narrative and symbol. The poems in *Incarnations* fall easily into groups—theme and variation, or narrative sequence—and a concern or an image that figures centrally in one poem may have additional reverberations elsewhere:

Earlier,
I have warned you not to look
too long at the brightness of
the sea, but now—yes—
I retract my words, for
the brightness of that nothingness which is the sea is
not nothingness, but is
like the inestimable sea of

Nothingness Plotinus dreamed.

Here nothingness is the central concept of the poem. But later, in a poem which deals with a traffic accident, and which is itself part of a linked series, the image occurs again:

. . . I
Must go somewhere where
Nothing is real, for only
Nothingness is real and is
A sea of light.

These interconnections of poems, the fact that Warren's imagination works easily with extended structures, gives to his book as a whole more of a sense of singleness than collections of poems generally have, and this deepens and multiplies the range of effect that is open to particular poems. It also, however, emphasizes those elements or those poems which fail to contribute to the book's desire for a unified accomplishment.

Of such poems, by far the clearest instance to me is "Myth on Mediterranean Beach: Aphrodite as Logos." It is a poem that demonstrates most of the things I dislike in Warren: it is long and monotonous, it strains (as its title alone might indicate) in its effort to unify object and idea, it permits detail sometimes to eddy and interrupt its direction, and finally it is mysterious about what that direction is: its conclusion is portentous without being illuminating:

For she treads the track the blessèd know
To a shore far lonelier than this

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Where waits her apotheosis.

She passes the lovers, one by one,

And passing, draws their dreams away,
And leaves them naked to the day.

The other aspect of *Incarnations* that troubles me is Warren's use of variation of voice. The introduction of ballad refrain or of a deliberate folksiness may perhaps be appropriate to the immediate subject, though I am not persuaded:

Oh, in the pen, oh, in the pen,
The cans, they have no doors, therefore
I saw him, head bent in that primordial
Prayer, head grizzled, and the sweat,
To the gray cement, dropped. It dripped,
And each drop glittered as it fell,
For in the pen, oh, in the pen,
The cans, they have no doors.

These changes of tone seem almost to serve Warren as the equivalent of characters in a novel, alternate voices by which the meaning is developed: "She might never have guessed how he'd been in/That durn creek again, and then lied,/And so might never have fetched him that/Awful whack." But I don't think at this point it is Warren's business to dissipate the singleness of his personal authority. It is more important that he pursue as intensively as he can the vision of things delighting in their existence:

Where the slow fig's purple sloth
Swells, I sit and meditate the
Nature of the soul, the fig exposes,
To the blaze of afternoon, one haunch
As purple-black as Africa, a single
Leaf the rest screens, but through it, light
Burns, and for the fig's bliss
The sun dies . . .

It is this kind of extreme realization that permits the book to move unhurriedly toward its real purpose:

The sound of the engine of the first fishing dory dies seaward. Soon
In the inland glen wakes the dawn-dove. We must try

To love so well the world that we may believe, in the end, in God.

IV

John Thompson's voice, in this very brief collection of poems,[10] is

[10] THE TALKING GIRL, by *John Thompson*. Pym-Randall Press. $4.00.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

also various, but the variety is a necessary part of his vocabulary of surprises. Where Warren's sense of the object is gained from a transparent, unhurried contemplation, Thompson depends upon the placement of the object in suddenly unexpected contexts and perspectives, and for this shifts of tone are of course his essential friend. The book starts quietly and conventionally enough:

> Towns as small as this, half-buried
> All the summer by the leaves,
> Are easy conquests when night drives
> Straight west across the limestone hills
> Until we are night's center.

But by the opening of the second poem something much more accelerated has taken place:

> See the little maunderer
> Stretch out on the grass!
> His heart is burst asunder
> The pieces cry Alas.
>
> Upright, fat pink pieces
> Of fluffy cloud float overhead.
> The little facets of his eyes,
> Split by salty tears, so tired . . .

And the title poem of the book heads straight out in the direction of country-and-western:

> She had a certain man once, there's no reason to say his name,
> They went over to Paris and Rome and slept in an airplane.
> She said she didn't love anybody but me.

The examples could easily be continued, but perhaps these are sufficient to give an idea of the book's considerable range.

That this variety doesn't end in mere fragmentation is due, I think, to the consistent energy of the poems—whatever technique they choose is pursued with a lively determination to see how much of a response can be got out of it, how far it can be pushed before it stumbles or explodes. And this matter of the extreme seems also to be a part of the poems' intention of radical honesty: what do we look like when our context sends us away from the pleasant confusion of our usual language? These poems are like cultures, in a way, each prepared for the growth of an isolable aspect of experience. The experiments are different, but there is a sense of unity in the fact that the purpose of the experimenter seems to remain the same.

It is also the quality of voice that dominates John Berryman's *His Toy, His Dream, His Rest,*[11] the new book which extends and com-

[11] HIS TOY, HIS DREAM, HIS REST, by *John Berryman*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $6.50.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pletes the *77 Dream Songs* of 1964. The annex is a good deal larger than the original building: there are 308 poems here, most of them following the three-stanza, eighteen-line pattern the earlier book established. They rhyme with some regularity; their line lengths vary considerably; sometimes they do and sometimes they do not run on.

But the statistics are only evasions, and will not characterize what the organized sprawl of the book is like or about. Berryman himself has given his own answer to the second question: "The poem then, whatever its wide cast of characters, is essentially about an imaginary character (not the poet, not me) named Henry, a white American in early middle age sometimes in blackface, who has suffered an irreversible loss and talks about himself sometimes in the first person, sometimes in the third, sometimes even in the second; he has a friend, never named, who addresses him as Mr Bones and variants thereof." I would be happy to believe all that (especially in view of the alertly challenging look Berryman wears on the book-jacket), but I really don't. Unless the protagonist of the dream songs is very close to being Berryman, as man and as poet, there seems little reason for his extraordinary language to exist.

That language does two things that seem to me unusual. First, it attempts a formal diction of poetry, with the compression and heightening such a diction normally implies, while at the same time remaining open to the largest possible range of the idioms of American speech. Second, the language attempts, within one continuous identifiable kind of formal poetic voice, to deal with a range of experience that is otherwise ordered only by the fact that it has some relationship to a central figure. The book seems to combine many elements of the journal and of the novel: its effort is not only to refute a boundary between public and private, but also to subvert distinctions of formal and spontaneous, to have both at once and to have them with equal force.

Such a possibility can come about only by rejecting the tug of the convention and establishing a pattern of consistent arbitrary forms. This Berryman does by reversing syntactical patterns, using subjunctive forms, crossing the arcane with the colloquial:

> Much petted Henry like a petal throve,
> his narthex let the girls & pupils in,
> aptotic he remained
> Henry's own man, when he squirmed not in love,
> fifty pressures herded one discipline:
> the sun shot up, it rained,
>
> weathering Henry kept on his own side,
> whatever in the name of God that side was.
> And he struggled, pal.
> Apricate never: too he took in his stride
> more than most monsters can. . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The invention of so personal a language makes it very difficult to distinguish between the speaker and the subject of the poem, especially when the subject is both human and continuously present. The effort is in any event an unnecessary one. If we recognize that the "I" of even the most intimate journal cannot be the identical "I" who writes it, we will have made all the differentiation that is required of us.

But if the poem is exceptionally personal, it is also still a world, it is inclusive. It has the unevenness that a world has: it is selfish, self-pitying, trivial, exalted, funny. It moves by its own laws, but they can be communicated. It sets entirely, entirely its own terms, and if they are sometimes maudlin and sometimes infuriating, they have still the power of great concentration and great consistency, and for that reason they are finally impressive and successful.

V

I don't remember having read the work of Wendell Berry before receiving this book,[12] and that's clearly my loss, as it would be for anyone who likes his poets to be located. Berry has a porch and a river, and he can sit on one and look at the other, something to me he does in a remarkably satisfactory way.

It is easy to suppose that the ills of poetry might be cured if we were all to return to the land, and let its beneficent simplicity instruct us. It is harder to realize that what the land offers is often not instruction but dialogue, and that for that dialogue to be effective, as it is in the Georgics, say, or in Frost, it may be necessary for the poet to speak first.

Berry accepts this knowledge and responsibility, which figure succinctly in "The Quiet":

> The fisherman rows up the river
> at midmorning, anchors
> outside the creek mouth.
> For hours he sits there
> in his boat, lines in the water,
> motionless and silent
> in the cool wind as a heron.
>
> The leaves have fallen.
> The rain has turned them
> pliant as water.
> Walking on them makes no noise.
> The country has taken on
> the quiet of the fisherman
> fishing alone.

[12] OPENINGS, by *Wendell Berry*. Harcourt, Brace & World. $4.50.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This sense of interaction, of a kind of mutual deference of person and place, seems to me central to Berry's intelligence: to what he knows, which is not what he asserts, but always what he discovers, as in this passage from "The Dead Calf":

> Where is the horror in it?
> Not in him, for he came to it
> as a shadow into the night.
> It was nameless and familiar.
> He was fitted to it. In me
> is where the horror is. In my mind
> he does not yield. I cannot believe
> the deep peace that has come to him.

This tone and sensibility seems to me close to that of William Stafford: like Stafford, Berry shows an outward-directed concern for physical fact, and a large respect for it, and, like Stafford, he is best when he can deal with a relationship of object and value, rather than with general social comment, where his tone is likely to become simplistic and forced:

> Sometimes he thinks the earth
> might be better without men.
> He's ashamed of that.
> It worries him,
> him being a man, and needing
> to think well of the others
> in order to think well of himself.

But that tone is infrequent. More usually, the careful, unexaggerated observation of place can permit that place to be appropriately, lucidly peopled:

> His love returns
> and walks among the trees,
> a new time lying beneath
> the leaves at her feet. . . .

Berryman depends on assertion, Berry on acceptance. Richard Wilbur, in his new book,[13] shows again the ability of the shape-changer, the capacity to move from form to form, or even from voice to voice, depending on the particular requirements made of him by the development of a given poem. In a period when the identity of the poet is often associated with the singularity of his voice (Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens), Wilbur's ability to mute the insistence of personality may make the level of his accomplishment less immediately evident, because the accomplishment is expressed in so many different ways. Wilbur is both a translator and a theatre-poet: situations in which one must speak another's words, or hear another voice speaking one's own.

[13] WALKING TO SLEEP, by *Richard Wilbur*. Harcourt, Brace & World. $4.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The title of Wilbur's second book was *Ceremony,* and that word still expresses, I think, much of his most central approach to the poem. To Wilbur, more than to anyone else I have been discussing here, it seems to me that form is a means of understanding, the shape of the poem one of the most serious comments on the meaning of the poem. And it seems also that form functions as a kind of charm: ceremony is the way in which the tissue of events is not only understood, but made moral and substantial. The long title poem of this book, "Walking to Sleep," is an exercise in how to control and formalize language to a given purpose:

> What you must manage is to bring to mind
> A landscape not worth looking at, some bleak
> Champaign at dead November's end, its grass
> As dry as lichen, and its lichens grey,
> Such glumly simple country that a glance
> Of flat indifference from time to time
> Will stabilize it.

The poem is a magic by which to go to sleep; it is also a comment on the way such magics work: they permit us to achieve an agreement with the world of which we are a part. That agreement is not a submission, or even necessarily a reconciliation, but it is an awareness of an order, as in this passage from the fine elegy, "For Dudley":

> It is the straight back
> Of a good woman
> Which we now notice. For her guests' hunger
> She sets the polished table.
>
> And now the quick sun,
> Rounding the gable,
> Picks out a chair, a vase of flowers,
> Which had stood till then in shadow.
>
> It is the light of which
> Achilles spoke,
> Himself a shadow then, recalling
> The splendor of mere being.

An intelligent affection, and an intelligent remorse; a sense of event in a long and various context: these are the qualities that seem most central here. They will not allow a poetry of extremes: the howl of absolute emotion or the arid geometries of absolute intellection. Aware both of people and their contexts, they celebrate that difficult thing: the simultaneous tenuousness and necessity of civilization.

The Blue Estuaries[14] reprints the contents of Louise Bogan's *Col-*

[14] THE BLUE ESTUARIES, POEMS/1923-1968, by *Louise Bogan.* Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $4.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Coming

In The Hudson Review:

E. M. Cioran
Zulfikar Ghose
W. H. Auden
William H. Youngren
Daniel Curley
Joyce Carol Oates
John Simon
Bernard Bergonzi
Wendell Berry
Herbert Leibowitz
Daniel Hoffman
Roger Sale
Philip Levine
Vernon Young
Jon Anderson
Raymond Durgnat
B. H. Haggin
Ulli Beier
George Scott-Moncrieff
William Empson
Stephen Farber
James Wright
Charles W. Millard
Marius Bewley

Robert Martin Adams

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lected Poems of 1953, and adds a dozen poems presumably subsequent to that work. The new poems do not alter Miss Bogan's tone or her concerns: they stress again what the *Collected Poems* showed us: the spare restraint, the absence of noise and distractions; above all, the desire to present relationships in their most severely essential form. The poem from which the new book's title is taken provides an illustration:

NIGHT

The cold remote islands
And the blue estuaries
Where what breathes, breathes
The restless wind of the inlets,
And what drinks, drinks
The incoming tide;

Where shell and weed
Wait upon the salt wash of the sea,
And the clear nights of stars
Swing their lights westward
To set behind the land;

Where the pulse clinging to the rocks
Renews itself forever;
Where, again on cloudless nights,
The water reflects
The firmament's partial setting;

—O remember
In your narrowing dark hours
That more things move
Than blood in the heart.

To be used in this fashion, the country must be observed with a still attention that resists the hasty demand to impose meaning, to label or package or sell. When place has time to assert its own continuity of existence, the difference between surface and essence can be identified, and that identification can then perhaps show us analogous differences in ourselves.

Such observation informs the body of Miss Bogan's work: as a result, the work is sudden, compact, and didactic:

Women have no wilderness in them,
They are provident instead,
Content in the tight hot cell of their hearts
To eat dusty bread.

The didacticism is an earned right, not a mannerism. Where Anne Sexton's poems turn always inward toward the inescapability of the event,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEW DIRECTIONS 21 *Anthology*

The current New Directions "Annual" carries on the tradition of its predecessors. Since 1936, when the first number in the series appeared, each volume has beeen an international literary showcase for experimental and unusual writing. Some contributors have been young and unpublished; others have been leaders of significant modern movements. All of them have one common goal—to extend the horizons of contemporary literature.

New Directions 21 includes:

THOMAS MERTON: "Plessy vs. Ferguson: Theme and Variations." A satire on Negro segregation by the late Trappist monk.

MARVIN COHEN: "Love by Proxy of Solitude." A short story by the author of *The Self-Devoted Friend.*

EMMETT JARRETT: "Design for the City of Man: A Vision." A long poem by an exciting young poet.

ERIK LINDEGREN: "The Man Without A Way." Poems by the "most important Swedish poet of his generation." Translated by Leif Sjoberg and Ronald Bates.

CESARE PAVESE: "Death Will Come and Have Your Eyes." The later poems of the eminent Italian. Tr. by Norman Thomas di Giovanni.

ROBERTO SANESI: "Information Report." A complex, interesting poem by the Italian exponent of "pure poetry." Tr. by William Alexander.

PAUL VAN OSTAIJEN: "Ika Loch's Brothel." In translation from the Flemish, a story by the important but too-little-known precursor of the modern movement.

POEMS by: Trim Bissell, Besmilr Brigham, Mitchell Goodman, Walter Hamady, William Bronk, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Anselm Hollo, W. S. Merwin, Edouard Roditi and Mark Strand.

STORIES by: Sanford Chernoff, James B. Hall, James Purdy, Mia Raffel and Margaret Randall.

Clothbound, $5.00—Paperbook, $2.45

Earlier New Directions "Annuals"

All of the earlier numbers of the New Directions anthology series, going back to 1936 are now in print, either in original or reprint editions. The following may be ordered from New Directions: ND11, $4.50; ND17, $1.95; ND18, $5.00 & $2.25; ND19, $6.00 & $2.75; ND20, $5.00 & $1.95. For all other numbers please request price list from Kraus Reprint Corp., 16 East 46, New York 10017.

NEW DIRECTIONS 333 Sixth Avenue, New York 10014

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

toward that hell which is hell because it has no belief in a location other than itself, Miss Bogan's vision is first of the thing, and then outwards; if we are truly responsive, the thing teaches us. The method that teaching takes is a greater understanding and a greater discrimination among the possibilities afforded us by language: as one by one the evasions are recognized and discarded, we may hopefully become more aware of what we can suppose to be permanently true.

I believe Miss Bogan does, often, achieve such permanence. The nature of her decisions and of her exclusions takes her a little way outside clock time, the perennial minutes and their different forms. No more than the convinced hard lyric can she be fashionable or sentimental, choosing the easier moment over the more demanding one. But it is the rigor of that choice that permits finally an upwelling of resonances:

> Goodbye, goodbye!
> There was so much to love, I could not love it all;
> I could not love it enough.
>
> Some things I overlooked, and some I could not find.
> Let the crystal clasp them
> When you drink your wine, in autumn.

When the place has been understood, the slightest hints assure us of it, so that even in passages in which it is not mentioned, we are persuaded that the figure in its necessary landscape is there.

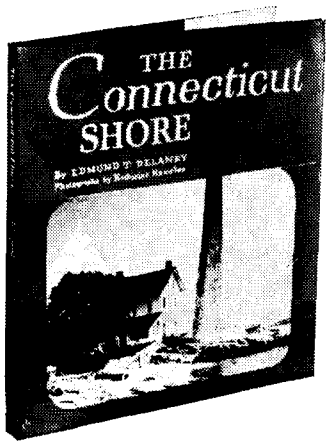
To Our Readers

THE HUDSON REVIEW announces that increased production costs have made necessary a rise in the cover price of the magazine and in its subscription rates. Since 1963 THE HUDSON REVIEW has kept its present price, although all our costs have been going up steadily.

Effective with the Autumn 1969 issue, single copies will cost $1.75, domestic subscriptions $6.00 per year, Canadian and foreign subscriptions $7.00.

New subscriptions will be accepted, and renewals and gift subscriptions will be honored at the present rates until August 1, 1969.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



THE CONNECTICUT SHORE

by Edmund T. Delaney
photographs by
Katharine Knowles

This delightful book combines the well-known talents of the author and photographer in a tribute to the history, achievements, continuing importance and beauty of the Connecticut shore. The reader is taken on a tour through the towns, recalling the Revolution when Connecticut contributed spirit, financial aid, and above all ships to the Patriot cause. Indeed, ships, shipbuilding and men of the sea have played a major part in the story of Connecticut.

128 pages (8½x9½) 148 photographs *$10.00*

BARRE PUBLISHERS, BARRE, MASSACHUSETTS 01005.

THE ARTIST AS CRITIC

Critical Writings of OSCAR WILDE

Edited by RICHARD ELLMANN

"Even his bad jokes are good bad jokes . . .

If Oscar Wilde wasn't brilliant, who ever was? The truth is, to subject oneself straight off to more than 400 pages of Wilde, especially after reading Richard Ellmann's introduction to them, which makes it all new, is to be dazzled all over again. . . . Wilde emerges now as not only brilliant but also revolutionary, one of the great thinkers of dangerous thoughts."
—WALTER ALLEN, front page, *N. Y. Times Book Review*

Drawing by David Levine

$10, now at your bookstore

RANDOM HOUSE

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE NOVEL OF WORLDLINESS

Crébillon, Marivaux, Laclos, Stendhal

PETER BROOKS

In his attempt to uncover the ethos and expressive techniques of the "novel of worldliness," the author gives detailed readings of works by Crébillon, Duclos, Marivaux, and Laclos, and also moves backward in time to consider the seventeenth-century *moralistes* and the drawing rooms in which literary forms applied to social man were eloquently elaborated. He concludes by discussing the later impact of Richardson, Rousseau and Stendhal on the worldly tradition. $9.50

HISTORICISM ONCE MORE

Problems and Occasions for the American Scholar

ROY HARVEY PEARCE

Collected here are some of Roy Harvey Pearce's best-known essays on historical criticism. The critical essays proper deal with major phases in the work of Cooper, Hawthorne, Whitman, James, Stevens, and Roethke. Introducing them are four essays which suggest a way of going beyond positivist historiography and formalist *explication de texte* toward a criticism which vitally engages the reader, enabling him to relate what he reads to American culture, past and present. $8.50

DIMENSIONS OF THE MODERN NOVEL

German Texts and European Contexts

THEODORE ZIOLKOWSKI

The author combines the techniques of close analysis and analogy to consider five major German novels—Rilke's *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, Kafka's *The Trial*, Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, and Broch's *The Sleepwalkers*. He places the novels in the context of European literature, and analyzes five powerful themes and metaphors which contemporary novels share: time, death, the thirty-year-old hero, criminality, and insanity. $10.00

Princeton University Press

Princeton, New Jersey 08540

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SUSPENDED CUBE
1938 painted steel
22¼", high

HUDSON RIVER LANDSCAPE
1951 painted steel
49½" high

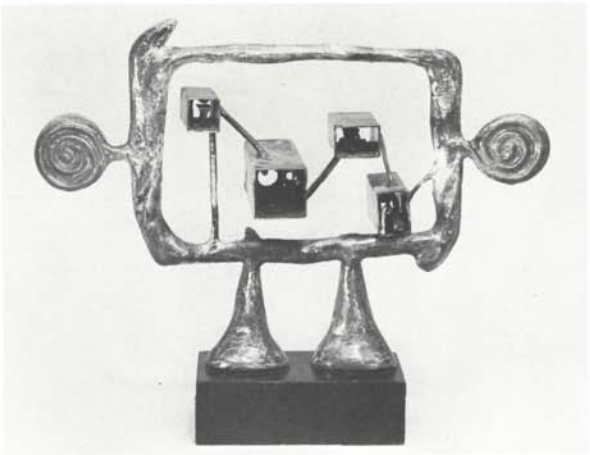
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

HEAD
1932 painted wood
22¾" high

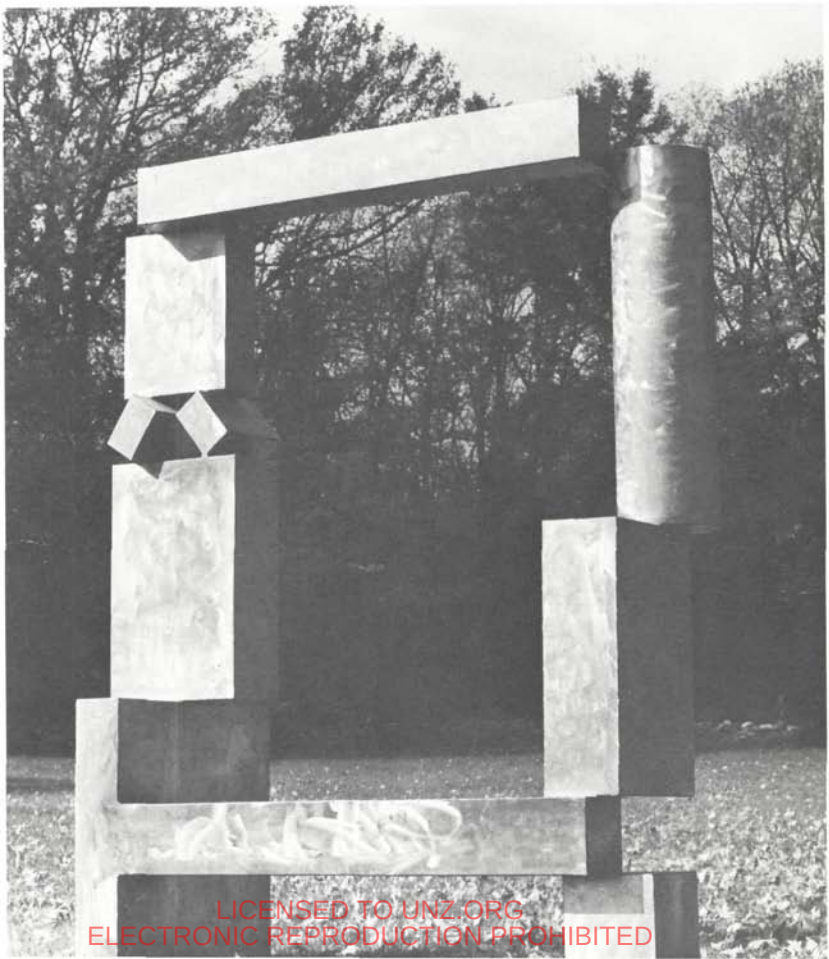
ZIG IV
1961 painted steel
95⅜" high

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WIDOW'S LAMENT
1942-43 steel and bronze
13⅝" high

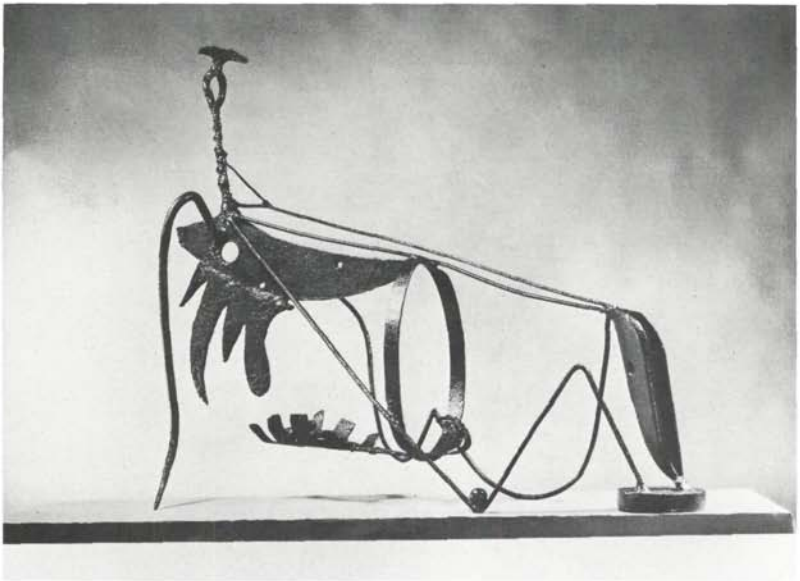


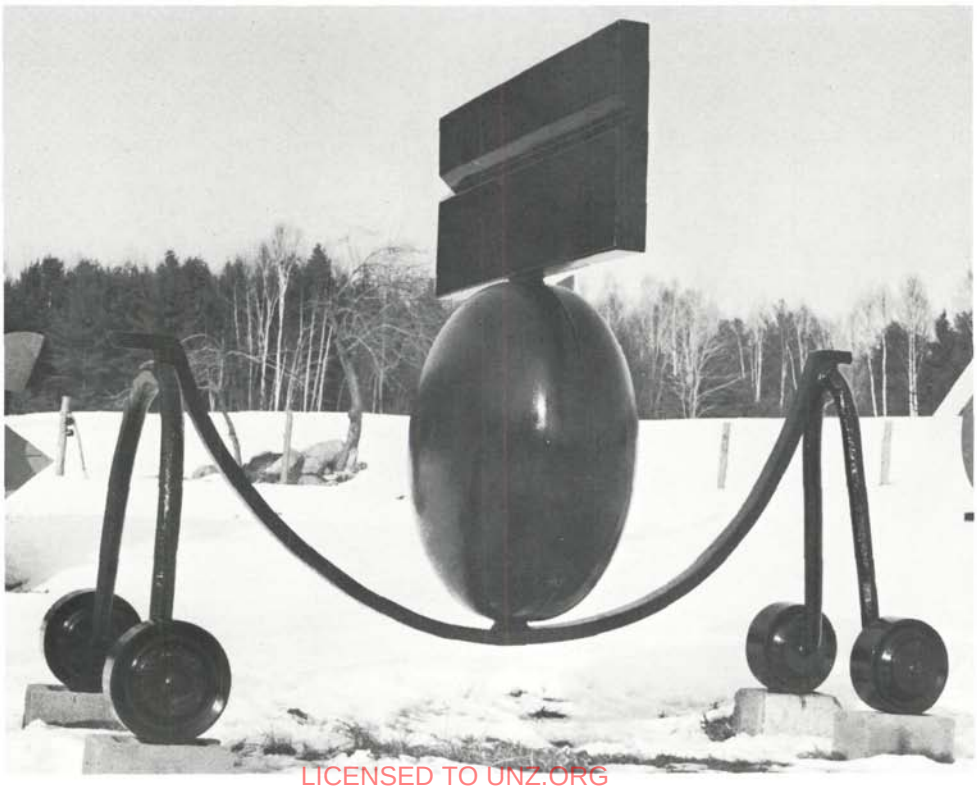
CUBI XXVII
1965 stainless steel
111⅜" high



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SUSPENDED FIGURE
1935 iron
21¾" high





LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WAGON I